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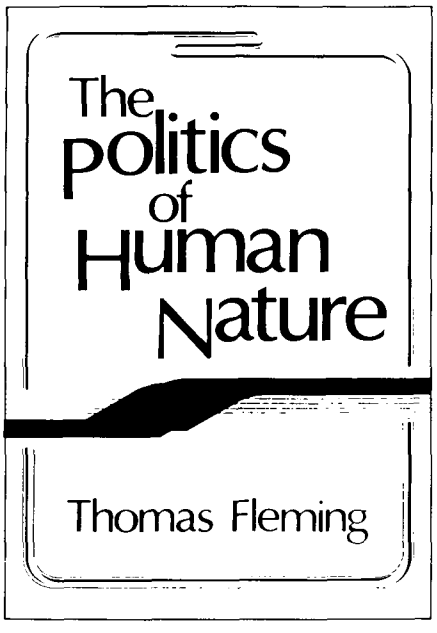

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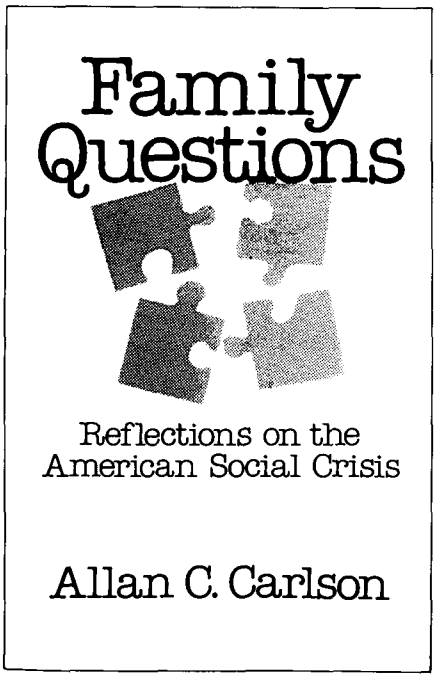

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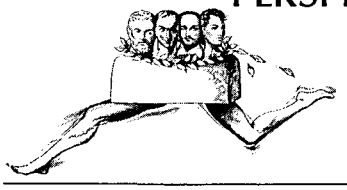
"Since I am coming to that holy room,
Where, with thy quire of saints for evermore
I shall be made thy Music; as I come
I tune the instrument here at the door,
And what I must do then, think here before."
—John Donne, "Hymn to My God in My Sickness"

PERSPECTIVE



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Detail of Robert Campin's *Annunciation* (by permission of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection). Inside illustrations by Krystyna Jachniewicz, except where noted.

DECEMBER 1989/3

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POLEMICS & EXCHANGES

On 'Gnawing Away at Vidal'

I have been watching the controversy stirred by Bill Kauffman's article on Gore Vidal (March 1989) with much interest and amusement. It took real courage on your part even to print the article, knowing it would stir reaction. However, it took much more intellectual courage to realize that as outrageous as Vidal can be, he is within the conservative tradition. This is, of course, not to say that Vidal is within the present conservative movement, and to your everlasting and totally misunderstood credit, you do not attempt to prove that point. Like him or not, Gore Vidal is the most important novelist of these times and certainly one of the best essayists in the history of American literature. His is a voice that demands our attention. I, too, see Vidal as firmly within a tradition that includes Henry Adams and H.L. Mencken. Vidal has described himself as a conservative cross that his liberal friends have to bear. He is a true iconoclast with respect to everything save American intellectual tradition. He is closer to the Founding Fathers than to modern liberalism. The fact that the "orthodox" conservative reaction to Vidal has been one of emotion rather than reason says more about the present state of conservatism than it does about Gore Vidal.

—Edward Garea
Irvington, NJ

On 'The Fallacy of Descriptivism'

Although concurring with Steven Goldberg's presentation of the general contradiction of descriptivism (July 1989) as well as his critique of elitist prescriptivism, I believe his example of the descriptivist's dilemma over the popular definition of "dictionary" is invalid, or at least incomplete.

When the descriptivist accepts the popular understanding of "dictionary" as a book that gives correct definitions, he does not grant "that there is a correct usage," which would contradict his own premises. The descriptivist merely admits that the popular definition of "dictionary" is valid, but he denies the validity of what dictionaries claim to do. His position is somewhat analogous to the Christian who applauds a proper definition of "sin," but disapproves of sinful activity.

In order to complete his critique of descriptivism, Mr. Goldberg needs to show the impossibility of the rather ironic leap from semantic descriptivism to ethical prescriptivism. Descriptivism's ultimate contradiction is that while it denies prescription or the notion of "ought," it puts that notion into its very premise by saying that one ought to follow the general state of affairs. To found "ought" merely on "is" is a dubious project in semantics and even more so in ethics.

—Bill Isley
Loures, Portugal

On 'Waking Up Middle-Aged'

I take issue with Jane Greer's assertion in her Letter From the Heartland (August 1989) that Helena Blavatsky and Alice Bailey are somehow to blame for the current so-called New Age Movement. Shirley Maclaine maybe, but not Blavatsky and Bailey. Nowhere does Blavatsky or Bailey imply that man *is* God; rather they agree with our own Declaration of Independence that all humans were created by God and are therefore part of God. I really don't see anything too blasphemous about any of this. My humble advice to Jane Greer is to throw away her New Age self-help tapes and go read some Alice Bailey instead. Ms. Greer will still be "old" and this will still be "life," but perhaps she won't feel compelled to waste money on New Age hucksters or energy writing about them.

And lighten up, Jane . . . 36 is a great age, this life ain't so bad, and the next one will probably be better.

See you on the Path.

—Carl F. Engelhardt
APO, NY

◆

The captions beneath the paintings of Colleen Browning were inadvertently switched in the October issue. The editors regret the error.

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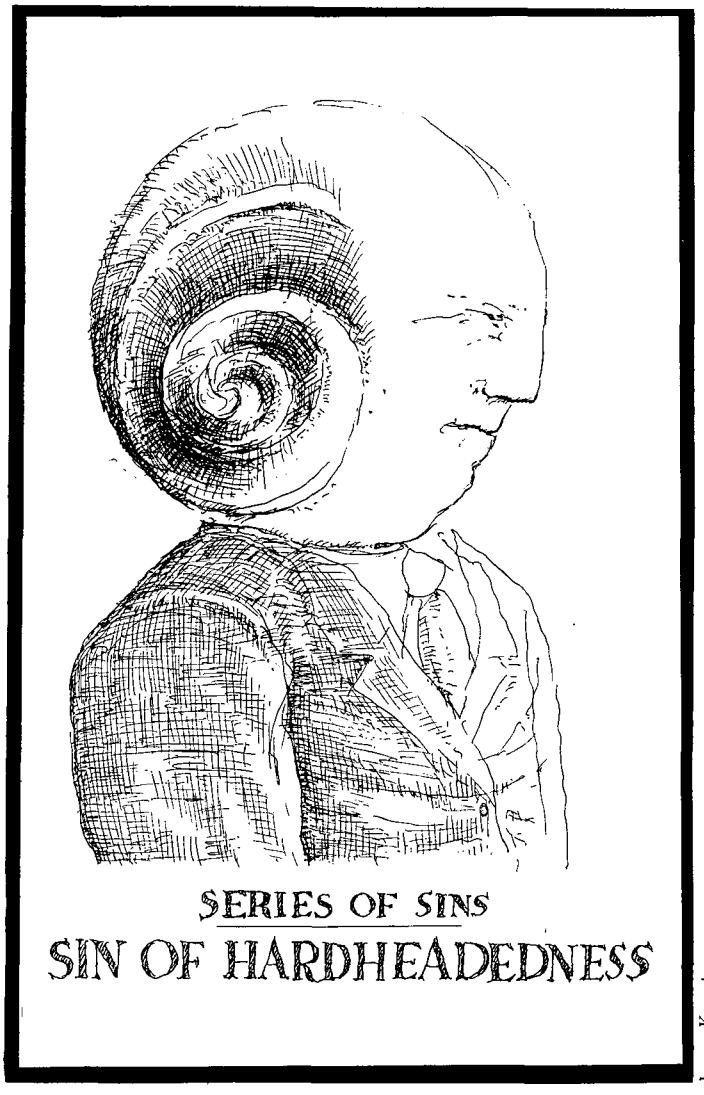
THE DISABILITIES ACT is likely to entertain C-SPAN viewers for months to come. The bill, which in its current form is a compromise worked out between the Bush administration and congressional Democrats, extends sweeping civil rights protection to the nation's blind, deaf, lame, and degenerate (AIDS is, of course, a handicap). Times being what they are, the only serious debate is over money. The telephone companies alone may end up paying up to $300 million a year in special services to the deaf, while many smaller businesses—faced with the bill for access ramps and special restroom facilities—will have to close up shop entirely. If we really do decide that there are 43 million handicapped citizens whose rights must be protected by federal law, the lawyers, as *The Wall Street Journal* observes, are the only real winners.

Forty-three million. That is something like one-fifth of the population. If you throw in blacks and Hispanics, atheists and religious minorities, old people and children, it will be hard to find an American who is *not* covered by some form of civil rights legislation. And 43 million is probably a low estimate, because a legally recognized disability in the 1980's means what a patent of nobility meant in the 17th century. The first thing that happens when a new privileged class is created is that millions of hitherto normal people suddenly discover that they too belong: members of the DAR married to descendants of Spanish grandees boast of their Hispanic surnames; North Carolina rednecks realize that their village really constitutes an Indian tribe; and deafness, which once meant the inability to hear, now is stretched to cover all forms of hearing impairment.

If you think about it long enough, everyone probably has some disability or another. I have this friend, a moderately successful white man from a middle-class family, but he does wear glasses and even had two operations on his eyes. What's worse, nature was unwise enough to give him a sharp tongue without the physique to match. The painful result was more than one concussion administered by sore losers. Who knows what sort of money the poor fellow might have made if he had been normal? Everyone, I repeat, is handicapped by nature and experience. The children of the rich are so lazy and arrogant that they lose the family wealth in only two generations. The bourgeoisie spends so much time working and saving that it never learns how to enjoy life. Southerners are undisciplined, Scandinavians morose, short people neurotic. Which is the worse handicap, deafness or an IQ of 105? Who's going to decide? Obviously, Congress and the courts. The deaf law student with an IQ of 135 will receive every assistance, at taxpayers' expense, to minimize the effects of his handicap, while the hardworking 105 would be well-advised to find another career or else start a lobbying group for people of ordinary intelligence.

Frankly, I don't think I am the only American who has heard about enough whining. How many times a day do you circle a parking lot, not daring to go into one of the dozen (always empty) places reserved for the officially handicapped? Who has not read of historic public buildings that had to be demolished because it would cost too much to provide access for wheelchairs, or college summer programs that had to be eliminated because of the high cost of providing



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tutors for one or two deaf or blind students? All we ever hear from the various advocacy groups is how the handicapped don't want pity, that the only handicap is our insensitivity, that they want to be free to lead independent lives. It turns out, however, that their freedom and independence always comes down to the freedom to put their hands in our wallets. That, of course, is the definition of a civil right.

But more important than all the economic and political implications of the bill is what it says about our civilization. To our credit, we like to think of ourselves as the most generous and charitable people in the history of the world. We probably are. It is also to our credit that we are willing to do what we can to make it easier for the victims of circumstance to lead normal lives. But it is also true that we are a people who have bent all our efforts toward making life a little better for the worst off, toward raising the minimum standards of living and literacy a few notches up, while neglecting entirely that reaching toward superiority that has characterized all great civilizations. We are a nation of readers, but we are reading James Mitchener; a nation of music-lovers who listen to Irving Berlin and Michael Jackson; a great power whose affirmative-action army boasts of conquering Grenada. It is only in sports that we care about excellence, and even there we measure success by money. When we are gone, what will the Chinese historical encyclopedias say of us? That they were a genial people who worked hard, ate bad food, and felt sorry for the unfortunate. (TF)

SOUTH AFRICA has been unable to deflect interference with its exercise of sovereign rights within its own borders. Other states have declared that racial discrimination as practiced in South Africa is such an egregious offense against "fundamental human rights" that interference is required, and since the Carter administration, the United States has relentlessly asserted that South Africa could best be understood through the prism of human rights. This same guiding principle was reasserted during the second Reagan administration. Over the past decade, America has increasingly criticized South Africa for claiming the sovereign right to project itself by striking the havens of armed opponents across its borders. South Africa has been said to be internationalizing apartheid by attacking black-ruled regional states such as Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Zambia.

Yet for at least the past two decades, and often quietly, South Africa has been reinforcing its international sovereignty and credibility by participating in a number of important development projects to assist other African states. Pretoria's Africa-centered approach was confirmed in New York City on December 22, 1988, when it joined Cuba and Angola's MPLA party in signing the Tripartite Agreement to provide for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Angola and for "internationally acceptable" independence in neighboring South West Africa/Namibia.

A few conservatives who had staunchly defended South Africa's sovereign right to determine domestic policy as well as make cross-border raids assailed the agreement as "suicide." Uneasy about where America's Africa policy might go after the 1988 election, some conservative critics of the Tripartite Agreement took aim at South Africa and especially its enduring foreign minister, Roelof F. "Pik" Botha. This reflects in part their visceral distrust of diplomats in general and the US State Department in particular. In Angola, the State Department prefers UNITA absorption into a cosmetically broadened MPLA regime to the free, fair multiparty elections envisioned in the Alvor Agreement. Some conservatives impute the same motives to South Africa. A few have visited there and assailed the ruling National Party, an endorsement welcomed by Conservative Party opponents. These American conservatives may have unwittingly allied themselves with South Africa's leftist opponents, who hope that Conservative Party gains in Parliament will polarize the country and make the revolutionary alternative irresistible.

Pretoria's international stance is, however, best evaluated in the light of the exercise of sovereignty, not burdened with analyses based on human rights standards or the struggle against international communism. If necessary, a sovereign nation must be willing to go it alone. This is a right we claimed in Grenada, Britain claimed in the Falklands, and France in Chad. Sovereignty and the imperative to survive motivate South Africa in its goals, tactics, and strategies, and in its approach to domestic and foreign policy. The imposition of a human rights test from overseas or by domestic opponents is unlikely to lead to a productive description of what is happening in and near South Africa.

In exchange for sovereign rights, the US is only offering multilateralism. The concept of human rights, especially as conjured up in the United Nations Declaration, ideally suits itself to trashing South African domestic and foreign policy. What South Africa's American critics may not always realize, however, is that by questioning South Africa's sovereign rights we are endangering our own. Multilateral approaches can backfire. We who are now imposing the human rights test on South Africa, having accepted the legitimacy of that multilateralism, may find ourselves on the receiving end in the future, making the best of an unsavory deal.

In this we are not only violating our own tradition and principles, but (on a more practical level) willfully misunderstanding this country. By insisting that South Africa must adhere to human rights standards, and abandon its perception of national interest and sovereignty, the US and others enamored with multilateralism find Pretoria a frustrating puzzle. If Pretoria's central motivations are ignored, American policy will always fail—as, in fact, it has since at least September 9, 1985, when President Reagan capitulated to State Department pressure and, adopting a human-rights approach, imposed his own punitive sanctions. A conservative analysis will likewise fail if conservatives insist on interpreting the Tripartite Agreement as a capitulation to communism, when Pretoria has instead been focusing on its own preservation. The mixture of evolutionary reform at home and assertiveness across borders does not mean that South Africa will bypass a diplomatic deal when it perceives that deal to be in its national interest.

Following the September 6 elections, South Africa's challenge shifts to the domestic front. Some success as-

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serting its sovereignty overseas has bought time for rapid, dramatic, and real political reform. In the election, English-speaking white voters returned to previous voting patterns and chose a new moderate-left party, the Democrats. Afrikaans-speaking voters picked either the National Party or the Conservatives. Finally, in the only province where successful multiracial power-sharing negotiations have occurred, Natal, voters were comfortable with the moderation of black leaders. The Conservatives were shut out there.

President F.W. DeKlerk's task is to preserve his nation's sovereignty by pacifying internal ferment through negotiation. His course may or may not scotch assaults on South Africa's sovereign rights. The American blindness remains: leftist Congressman Howard Wolpe, a Michigan Democrat, joins Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak in demanding more sanctions, while die-hard conservatives, calling DeKlerk's remarks a "speech at Appomattox," may raise funds in the US for the Conservative Party. America would do better to contribute to positive change by supporting a responsible course, not by making South Africa more turbulent by fueling revolution.

—*Bruce Rickerson*

THE ANTI-DRUG CRUSADE contains the common hype along with always-commendable pledges to crack down on drug criminals and introduce "zero tolerance" for users. Nonetheless, President Bush's war on drugs can only fail, for it insists on attacking the symptoms of the problem rather than the real disease itself.

Social research on the use of illegal drugs shows one consistent theme: intact traditional families strongly discourage drug use; broken families or "alternative family forms" encourage it. Our "drug crisis" is in large measure the result or symptom of our "family crisis." No number of new prisons or treatment programs can repair the damage to the young caused by family decay.

In the 1964 study *The Road to H*, Isidor Chein and his coauthors studied the family patterns of heroin addicts and found that 97 percent of "addict families" showed a "disturbed relationship" between the parents (e.g., divorce or history of separation), compared to only 41 percent of drug-free families. Another intensive study from that period by William Westby and Nathan Epstein reported that "father-led" families with traditional mothers who were "deeply satisfied" with their role as housewife produced "emotionally healthy children." Meanwhile, "mother-dominant" families or "sharing fathers" (where the mother and father strove to hold equal roles) spawned serious pathologies in children, including the abuse of drugs.

Horatio Alger's Children, an extensive report on a sample from Marin County, California, prepared by Richard Blum and Associates in 1972, identified family-oriented factors related to "low risk" and "high risk" of teenage drug use. The team found that "low risk" families held an unquestioned belief in God; regularly attended church; were father-led and authoritative; had more children; and had mothers who gave first priority to their home and family, and had voted for George Wallace in 1968(!). "High risk" families, in contrast, had mothers who were employed and gave priority to meeting their "human potential"; had fathers who were "overly intellectual [and] took on mothers' functions"; and were skeptical about God and rarely attended church. Simply put, intact, religious, traditional families successfully used "protective measures to ensure that external influences will not affect family unity" and gave their children enough "intestinal fortitude" to fight temptation.

Work in the 1980's confirms the same points. One study found marijuana use by youth related to the presence of "unconventional" mothers. Another found that drug-users came from families where the fathers were "weak." A major study by Dr. Alfred S. Friedman of 2,750 adolescents admitted to drug treatment programs found that the larger the family of origin (more siblings and extended family members in the home) the lower the use of drugs, while parental separation and divorce produced more abuse among the children. In a 1985 article in *The American Journal of Sociology*, two researchers showed a strong negative relationship between "conventional family roles" and marijuana use. More recently, a study at UCLA reported again that parental divorce and other signs of "inadequate family structure" significantly aggravated drug and alcohol abuse, while work at the University of Southern California found that "latch-key" adolescents with working mothers were twice as likely to abuse drugs and alcohol as those enjoying after-school care.

In sum, the overwhelming evidence shows that intact, traditional families help prevent drug abuse. Alternate family forms encourage it. The cynical reality is that existing federal and state policies actually help disrupt family life in ways that will invariably increase drug abuse. Take our welfare system, which discourages marriages and encourages female-headed families, or the day-care subsidies and the income tax structure that encourage mothers to work outside the home, or an ongoing war against "sexism" that disrupts traditional gender roles, or "no-fault divorce" that has cheapened the meaning of the marriage covenant. Proposed new programs of "workfare" and the ABC "child care" bill can only compound the problem.

On the one hand, government policy disrupts families and produces even more children and youth "at risk" of drug abuse. On the other hand, the government declares "war" on illegal drug use, and proposes to expand its powers, size, and spending. The predictable result will be both more government and more drug abuse.

—*Allan Carlson*

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION has come to mean no freedom of dissociation, at least not in Madison, Wisconsin. There a city statute barring discrimination in housing has been interpreted by the Madison Equal Opportunities Commission (MEOC) to apply to roommates. In other words, when Ann Hacklander and Maureen Rowe were told by their prospective roommate Cari Sprague that she was a lesbian, and decided (politely) not to room with her for that reason, they were breaking the law.

After Ms. Sprague complained to the city, the MEOC asked Hacklander and Rowe to come in and discuss the matter. In a 4-½ hour meeting, during which the two women were in tears,

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the MEOC pressured them to agree in principle to this proposed settlement: that between the two of them they would pay Sprague $1,500 in damages; that they would attend a two-hour "training class" conducted by a homosexual organization; that they would have their housing situation "monitored"—the word was not defined—for two years by the MEOC; and that they would write a letter of apology to Sprague. During this meeting the two women were not represented by a lawyer. When one of the women, just out of college and with a large college loan debt to repay, said the settlement would bankrupt her, the MEOC informed her that bankruptcy would not make any difference.

The Madison City Council president, Sue Bauman, while being a proponent of antidiscrimination legislation, thinks that the city housing law should not apply to roommate situations, and on September 19 the council voted 19 to 2 to amend the law accordingly. Mary Pierce of the MEOC, citing a confidentiality agreement, will not comment on the case at all. But as of this writing, according to Hacklander and Rowe's lawyer, Bruce Davey, the MEOC is going ahead with its process, and taking the matter to its final stage—a public hearing before a hearing examiner. Presumably, with the City Council having clarified their language, with the precedent of the identical state law having been interpreted in their favor, and with several signs of duress evident in the way their case was handled by the MEOC, the two women have a good case. They will still be out their lawyer's fee, however, and not content with her MEOC action Ms. Sprague has filed suit in Circuit Court. Ms. Hacklander and Ms. Rowe will also still be out their time and their distress.

This is where equity legislation will get you. In the interests of protecting homosexuals—and, incidentally, convicted murderers, whom (according to Mary Pierce) the two women also could not legally have turned away—the city of Madison has proposed a series of punishments that would violate the rights of even convicted felons on probation.

Madison is not just saying that homosexuality (and a murder conviction) should be tolerated. Madison's Equal Opportunity Commission is saying that homosexuality (and a murder conviction) are such goods that they must be protected with every bit of energy the law will allow. Protecting this actual lesbian and this theoretical murderer must come even at the price of frightening, harassing, fining, and "re-educating" two ordinary, tax-paying citizens.

Ann Hacklander has said that she personally had no prejudice against lesbians, but that Ms. Rowe was uncomfortable with the idea of living with one, and so her roommate would hardly force it on her. After what Hacklander has gone through in the name of tolerance, does anyone think she is so friendly to the homosexual lobby now? (KD)

M.E. BRADFORD, who introduces the essay by Donald Davidson, is a professor of English at the University of Dallas. A former student of Davidson's, Professor Bradford is currently at work on a biography of the poet and essayist commissioned by The University of Virginia Press.

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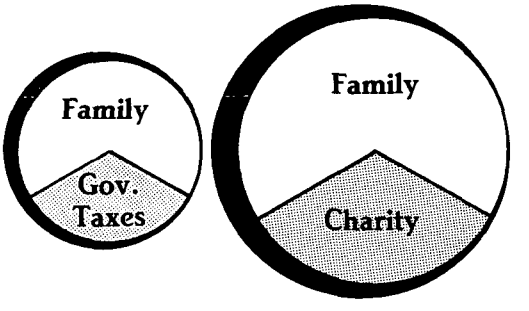

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Principalities & Powers
by Samuel Francis

If conservatives carried revolvers, they'd probably reach for them at the sound of the word "nationalism." Perhaps it's just as well they don't carry revolvers, since nationalism usually makes its appearance armed with considerably bigger guns. In the Europe of Metternich and Castlereagh, nationalism was the vehicle for the revolutionary destruction of dynastic and aristocratic regimes and the parent of all sorts of modern nastiness. "From the French Revolution," wrote the conservative Anglo-Polish historian Sir Lewis Namier, "dates the active rise of modern nationalism with some of its most dangerous features: of a mass movement centralizing and levelling, dynamic and ruthless, akin in nature to the horde."

American conservatives have never been much more enthusiastic about nationalism than their European counterparts. The opposition to ratification of the US Constitution was led by country gentlemen who knew very well that Alexander Hamilton's national unification meant merely the consolidation of Northeastern dominance over the states and their distinctive subcultures. For the first seventy years of American history, the main political conflict revolved around whether the nationalists of the Northeast would succeed in impressing their thumbprints on the wax of the new republic. That, as Richard Weaver saw, was the issue in Daniel Webster's debates with South Carolina's Senator Robert Young Hayne, and the concrete meaning of Webster's "Liberty and Union" speech was that the republic should be unified around the Northeastern goals of economic expansion and national power.

As every schoolboy knows (or used to know, back when teachers told schoolboys about Abraham Lincoln), those goals eventually triumphed, and the "equality" that Lincoln and his supporters preached with their terrible swift swords was largely a mask for an orgiastic ethic of producing and consuming, the Great Barbecue that culminated only in the present century. In Lincoln's day and under his leadership, Northeastern financial and industrial centers finally gained enough material power and resources to crush their rivals. It was neither patriotism nor piety that ultimately made the *unum* prevail over the *pluribus*, but the acquisitive habits that Lincoln's "equality of opportunity" rationalized and that modern advertising, credit instruments, mass media, and government-managed demand succeeded in creating.

Be all that as it may, the United States today is a unitary nation-state, as much as traditionalist conservatives may be loath to admit it. If you don't believe this, travel to a city other than the one in which you live. You will discover that just about any place you visit in the United States today looks almost exactly like the one you just left. Fast-food palaces, shopping malls, mammoth supermarkets, hotel chains, modern highway networks, office buildings, high-rises, and parking lots now define the public orthodoxy of the nation. If you visit bookstores, watch television, go to the movies, or listen to music or the news in any American city, what you read, see, or hear will be very much the same as in any other city. On a recent visit to Atlanta, I found that the local TV news was all about child abuse, drug busts, and local political corruption — exactly the same as in Washington. Only the street names were different.

National unification of the United States has meant the destruction of local and regional variations and their homogenization under a regime of centralized power — economic and cultural as well as political. But homogenization doesn't stop at the water's edge. The universalist and cosmopolitan formulas that justified national unification — equality of opportunity, human rights, economic growth, and material progress — don't distinguish between one nation and another, and ultimately they demand the abolition of national distinctiveness and identity just as easily as they do the homogenization of subnational regional and cultural particularity. The forces that bring Kentucky Fried Chicken to Nebraska and Nevada, disseminate the political insights of Rivera and Donohue to housewives in Wyoming, and decide how small businessmen in Birmingham should provide for the safety and health of their workers also will export such progress to the rest of the world. Indeed, the logic of this century's technological unification, and the interests of the elites that created and run it, dictate that the unity of the nation make way for the homogenization of the world.

The globalist dynamic is working itself out even now. The September issue of *Scientific American* was devoted to the topic of "Managing Planet Earth," and the thesis of Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, that the United States is in a condition of decline, is routinely exploited to justify the management of decline so that the United States, in Professor Kennedy's words, can "adjust sensibly to the newer world order." Secretary of State James Baker and Mikhail Gorbachev become almost weepy when they talk about the "transnational issues" that will fill the diplomatic platters of the future — arms control, conflict management, global environmental and economic policies, and, of course, drugs. American servicemen already are in South America to help its governments perform what ought to be entirely domestic law enforcement functions against the Medellin Cartel, itself a transnational corporate state. Global democratization is only one part of the effort to envelop the entire planet in a postindustrial web that will strangle local cultural, economic, and political autonomy.

Some Americans, especially the cosmo-conservatives in Manhattan and Washington, may fantasize that globalization will yield another "American Century," with Yankee know-how tossing institutional and ideological candy bars to fetching senoritas in the Third World. But blue-collar workers in Detroit and construction men in Texas probably have a better grip on the realities of globalization as they watch their own jobs disappear before Asian competition and illegal immigrants. Globalization doesn't mean that America will prevail, but that it will vanish among the electrons and laser beams by which the planet is to be held together, just as Midwestern small businesses and Southern family farms

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vanished into the financial and industrial grids of the 19th-century nationalists.

But compared to what globalism has in store for us, nationalism looks pretty good. If what remains of the Middle American nucleus of American culture is to survive, it will have to evolve a new nationalist consciousness capable of resisting the global managerial system and of challenging its domestic apologists. This means that the main instruments of globalization—the internationalization of domestic law and policy through gradual subordination to transnational organizations and treaties; the internationalization of the economy through free trade and investment; and the internalization of the historic American population itself through mass immigration and the delegitimation of the European roots of its culture—have to be decisively repudiated.

It also means a radical rejection of what historically has been the basis of American nationalism—the cult of economic growth, material acquisition, and universal "equality of opportunity"—and its reformulation in a new myth of the nation as a distinctive cultural and political force that cannot be universalized for the rest of the planet or digested by the globalist regime. Finally, it means that Middle America, for once, will have to get its act together to challenge the power of the ideological globalists who now prevail in the nation as both the "left" and the "right."

"In every republic," wrote Niccolò Machiavelli, "there are two parties, that of the nobles and that of the people." The former "have a great desire to dominate, whilst the latter have only the wish not to be dominated, and consequently a greater desire to live in the enjoyment of liberty." In the American republic, the "nobles" have corresponded to the forces that sought the unification of the country under their own formulas of egalitarian and acquisitive nationalism and who now beat the drum for global homogenization. The "people" have consisted of those groups and sections that have resisted unification, that wanted only to be left alone, and who sought, as Weaver described Hayne's idea of freedom, "protection to enable him to enjoy things, not a force or power to enable him to do things."

But the mere "wish not to be dominated," as the anti-federalists, the Confederates, the agrarian populists, and, most recently, the grass roots adherents of the New Right wanted, has not sustained their independence and freedom or the integrity of their cultural institutions. If what remains of such forces are serious about resisting being swallowed by the new transnational colossus, they will have to recognize that they can do so only by dominating—that is, by becoming "nobles" themselves, by uniting in a new Middle American nationalism, and by putting aside the divisions and distractions that have turned them into the victims of fortune, instead of her master.

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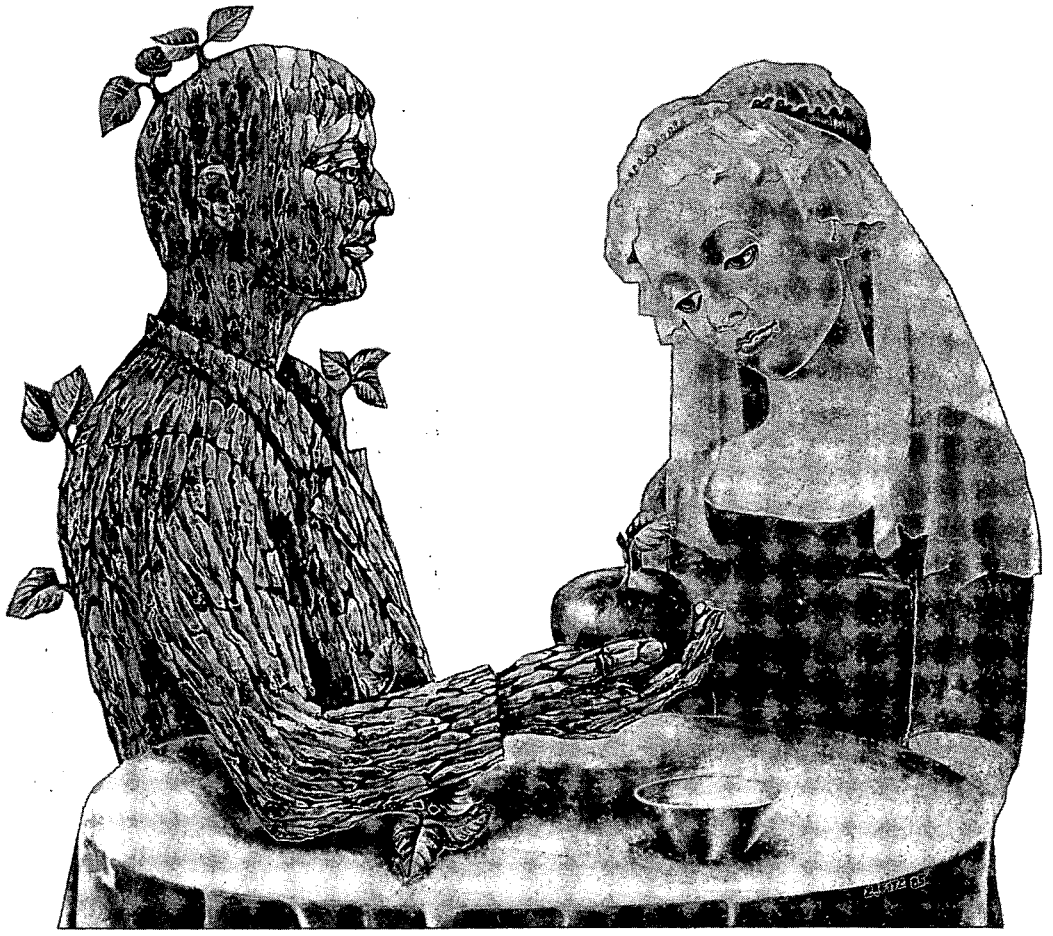

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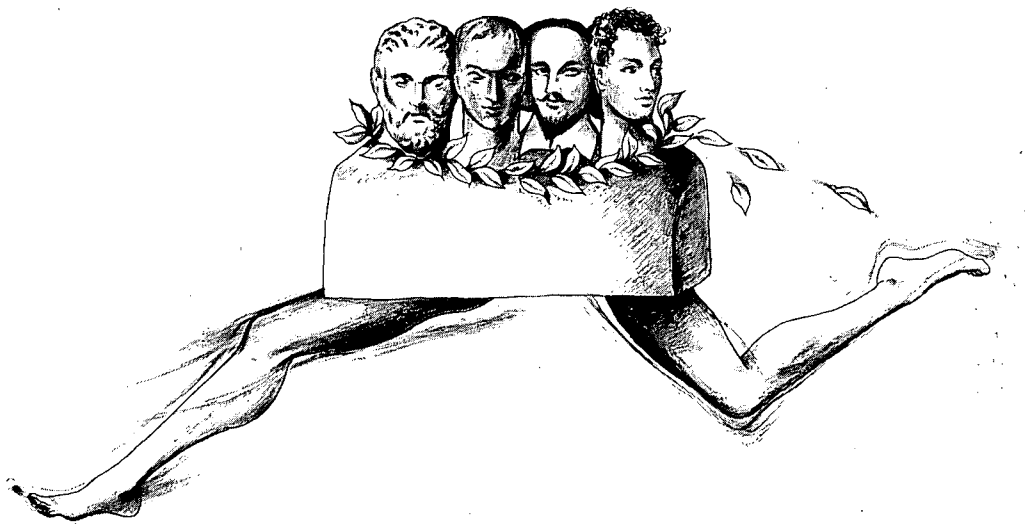

Nunc Est Bibendum

Or Now That Poetry Is Dead, I Think I'll Just Sit Here and Drink

by Thomas Fleming

A new battle of the books is in progress. This time, the lines are not being drawn between modern and ancient but between the present and the recent past, and the antagonists are not Homer against Milton or Aristotle vs. Bacon, but such younger poets as Dana Gioia and Fred Turner against an academic poetry establishment that has rejected form and narrative in favor of private communication in a flat, unbeautiful language that runs the gamut from insipid to unintelligible. Too simply put, the battle is over rhyme and reason.

The beginning of any war narrative should include an estimate of comparative strengths. At first glance, it looks bad for the rebels. The modern/postmodern establishment has virtually all the resources. It controls the granting agencies—public and private, the major literary prizes, creative writing programs, journals, and professorships. However, the "new formalists"—a dreadful term I shall use just this once—have a number of valuable assets. Since their work is generally accessible, it has the potential for attracting a large audience. What is more important at this stage of our cultural history, the rebellious posture has a peculiar charm for modernist intellectuals, who have a hard time realizing that they are themselves the "them," the Establishment, the powers that be.

The war has heated up in recent months, with both sides scoring major victories. The rebels not only succeeded in putting out a manifesto issue of *Crosscurrents* but also released a volume of essays, *Expansive Poetry: Essays on the New Narrative and the New Formalism*. They were given a probably unintentional assist from Joseph Epstein, whose essay in *Commentary* "Who Killed Poetry?" forcefully makes the commonsense argument that Americans have given up on poetry and for good reasons. The essay was reprinted in *Associated Writing Programs Chronicle*, with rejoinders from a number of poets. Some of the answers were prudent; most were hysterical and irresponsible and as badly written as the writers' verse. Such consistency is, I suppose, a mark of their sincerity.

Mr. Epstein's most serious charge is simply that poetry is now an academic question. Not so long ago, poets were insurance executives and physicians and bankers; now they are all, uniformly, professors on the make. The only poet to endorse (with suitable reservations) this criticism was Dana Gioia, himself a business executive. As Mr. Gioia points out in his rejoinder, the weakest part of Mr. Epstein's case is his lack of familiarity with the few good poets writing in English today, on both sides of the Atlantic. But these are, unfortunately, the exceptions that prove the rule, since apart from elder statesmen like Richard Wilbur and X.J. Kennedy, few of the traditional poets have received any attention from the official organs of the literary establishment. A few have received grants, but for the most part the traditionalists do not wear medals, hold distinguished chairs at great universities, or find themselves interviewed on National Public Radio.

The academic reaction to Epstein's article betrayed the

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bad conscience or at least the unease of the modernist royalty. It also served to close ranks and draw back into the fold a writer who might have been a major defector, Donald Hall. After a lifetime of writing volumes of the usual stuff, leavened now and then with poetry, Mr. Hall had reached the point in his career (i.e., retirement from teaching) when he could afford to take risks. In recent years he has been complaining against the lack of ambition displayed by contemporary poets and censuring the writing programs for teaching young poets how to manufacture "McPoems." Not content with calling for the abolition of the MFA in creative writing, Hall ridicules the trade newsletters that give advice on prizes and jobs: "For jobs and grants go to the eminent people. As we all know, eminence is arithmetical: it derives from the number of units published times the prestige of the places of publication. People hiring or granting do not judge quality—it's so subjective!—but anyone can multiply units by the prestige index and come off with the *product*."

Coming from an insider, Hall's criticisms are far more withering than anything in Epstein's article. However, to atone for such conspicuous disloyalty, Mr. Hall has sung his palinode in the September *Harper's*. As it turns out, there is no problem with American verse. Poetry sells better than ever, he argues, and young "men" get misty-eyed and hysterical at poetry readings. Epstein's arguments are only "blurbtalk"—which apparently means that the editor of *The American Scholar* knows how to write better prose than Mr. Hall's.

Setting out to illustrate the cliché that "figures don't lie but liars figure," Mr. Hall insists that while in the 1950's trade publishers used to release a thousand copies of a poetry book, they now routinely publish four to five thousand. He's exaggerating at both ends. In the 40's and 50's there were still alive poets who could actually make money off poetry. Frost, Jeffers, and Eliot not only sold well, but they were public figures whose opinions on art, politics, and social questions made their influence felt far beyond the narrow confines of literature classes. And what Mr. Hall is not telling about those 4-5,000 press runs (more often 1,500-2,000) is that the biggest buyers are libraries. What is more chilling to contemplate is the size of the poetry establishment itself. There's hardly a community college in Nebraska that cannot boast of its poet-in-residence. There are, quite literally, thousands in the business, with countless little magazines publishing their stuff, and a reasonably well-established figure is still lucky if he sells five thousand books.

Ultimately, the question is not over whether William Carlos Williams sold more books than Thom Gunn, but it is the whole project of modernism in poetry that is at issue. Modernist poets self-consciously set out to make themselves obscure and unappetizing. More seriously, they saw themselves as a sort of alienated priestly cast, guerrillas whose job it was to throw their bombs from outside the city walls. While this assumed importance lent the project an air of seriousness (Mr. Epstein speaks of poetry as "an exalted thing"), the net effect has been to whittle poetry's general audience down to the thousands of people who are paid (usually by taxpayers) to practice or study it.

One hundred years ago poets were great public figures, more like rock stars than writers. Lord Tennyson was mobbed on the street by fans hoping to tear off a piece of his coat. In *The Place of Poetry* Christopher Clausen points out that 19th-century poets could get rich. Byron was paid something like $50,000 for a single canto of *Childe Harold*. But with the divergence of mass culture and high culture, a poet is "faced with the choice of being either trivial . . . or so outside the main concerns of his age as to seem irrelevant to all but a small minority of readers." Quite correctly, Clausen points out that "the serious poet's isolation and impotence are at least partly his own doing," since pop poets and songwriters can get rich if they are willing to address the concerns of ordinary men and women.

Since most poets are in no position to "sell out" (what talent would they sell and to whom?), they have given up all hope of attracting an audience. Tennyson wrote for a broad middle-class audience; Eliot wrote for the college-educated intelligentsia; Ashbery writes for his peers, which in his case means the people who hand out grants and medals. As

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The still untold history of modernism is of the religious reactionaries who were so disgusted by *fin-de-siècle* Europe and America that they created new and wonderful pieces of art as so many weapons against progress.

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George Garrett remarked to Madison Smartt Bell in his *Chronicles* (June 1988) interview, grants, prizes, etc. have made it "worthwhile now for the first time in the 20th century to be a careerist in poetry." Since there is, nonetheless, a shortage of emoluments, "there is a temptation to belong to a group which has some power and prestige." The general effect is of "a small trough with a lot of pigs trying to get up there."

What Mr. Garrett has sketched are the familiar outlines of small group politics, the profile of every conspiracy or faction that seeks to advance the interest of its members. To some extent, poets in advanced societies have always formed circles and looked for powerful allies. Vergil and Horace had their Maecenas, Pope and Swift their Bolingbroke. Indeed, the poetry of faction has an ancient and honorable tradition. Such diverse writers as William Wordsworth and Samuel Johnson both played the part of Tory pamphleteer on occasion, and near the very beginning of lyric poetry we find Alcaeus of Mytilene writing his best work in defense of a conspiracy that tried more than once to seize power. His one line that has survived into modern consciousness in the watered-down Horation tag, "*nunc est bibendum*," was the beginning of a poem celebrating the death of a political enemy: "We've got to get drunk, now that Myrsilus is dead."

But ancient poets of faction all conspired, in principle, for the good of their country. Even Plato's dramatist uncle Critias, leader of the Thirty Tyrants, seemed to have believed that his brand of aristocratic fascism was the best

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form of government. To some extent this concern for the commonwealth continued to characterize political poets down to the end of the 18th century. A more ominous development was the aesthetic cliquishness and disdain for the broader community that developed among the Romantics. How many poets since have adopted the aloofness of Byron's Childe Harold: "I have not loved the world, nor it me . . . " or Shelley's Prometheus, a creature in rebellion against all the laws of man and God? And since the Romantics Britain, Europe, and the United States have all witnessed wave after wave of little movements carrying the banners of progress or reaction: Parnassians, Wagnerians, the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, Decadents, Imagists, Surrealists, Objectivists, Confessionalists . . . so many. In the earlier stages, the writers at least claimed to be bent on revolutionizing society, and the Pre-Raphaelites left behind, in addition to their verse, some rather pretty pictures, a scattering of soft communist political tracts, handsomely printed books, and the Morris Chair. What is the legacy—in politics or furniture—of Robert Lowell and Allen Ginsberg?

Today's grant-grubbing conspirators are a far cry from Alcaeus, although their tactics are not all that different from those of Critias, who seized power and distributed the wealth of the state among his loyal followers. But there is a higher type than the poetry of faction, one that is far rarer in our century than ever before. If factional poetry unites a set of comrades in a conspiracy against either the nation or against other factions, there is also a poetry of community that celebrates the interconnectedness of the commonwealth. Most primitive song is of this type, but civilized societies have known it, too. However we choose to interpret the *Aeneid*, Vergil's masterpiece was clearly meant to convey to the Roman people some sense of their tradition and history. When the ancestor of the Romans visits the underworld to gain knowledge of his future, he is introduced to a procession of the heroes who will make Rome great.

Shakespeare in his *Histories*, while he was no match for Vergil as a poet, was clearly about the same business, as was Tennyson in his *Idylls*. In this century, one thinks first of Kipling, whose children's book *Puck of Pook's Hill* is an exact parallel with the *Aeneid*; of Eliot's *Quartets*; and—strange to say—of Hart Crane, whose greatest literary undertaking (*The Bridge*) brings together Pocahontas, Whitman, Melville, and Columbus into the American equivalent of Aeneas' visit to the underworld.

However, the clearest examples of such poetry are to be found in the tradition of Greek choral lyric poetry and in the great literary forms that developed out of it, Attic tragedy and comedy. Only a handful of tragedies survive—31, as a matter of fact—all written in a period of less than seventy-five years by three citizens of a city-state roughly the size of metropolitan Rockford, Illinois, Columbia, South Carolina, or Boulder, Colorado. To match the record of such a town (to call Athens a city in the modern context sounds amusing), we could call up the record of two hundred years of Anglo-American civilization, in vain. (To match the literary record of a jerkwater little island like Keos, we should have to point to the center of American literary civilization, Mississippi, which gave us William Faulkner, Walker Percy, Eudora Welty, and Shelby Foote.)

The career of the first of the great Athenian dramatists is instructive. Born to a noble family, he was 15 when the tyrant Hippias was driven out. As he grew to manhood, he witnessed the dramatic restructuring of political life initiated by Cleisthenes. He was 35 when he took part in the heroic defense of his city against the Persians on the plain of Marathon, and 45 when his people abandoned their city and took their chances on the naval battle that took place off the island of Salamis. Aeschylus was probably at Salamis, which he described in his earliest surviving play. We know he was at Marathon (where his brother died: the Persians chopped his hand off as he tried to keep a boat from getting away) because that is the only event recorded in his epitaph. Of his efforts in the creation of tragedy, his many victories at the Greater Dionysia, his enormous popularity with the Athenian people, who after his death passed an extraordinary measure authorizing repeat performances of his plays—not a word.

Citizen, soldier, poet, dramatist, Aeschylus wrote the plays—words, music, dances—staged them, acted in them, all for an audience of fellow citizens, most of whom had never read a book. They were performed at a religious festival in honor of the god Dionysus and expressed—as no art form has done since—the corporate concerns of the community. While it is hard to believe that Vergil took his tales of gods and goddesses any more literally than we do, there is no doubt that the Athenians—whose superstitious nature St. Paul remarked upon—were deeply religious pagans. There was nothing metaphorical or mythical about the religious dimensions of the *Oresteia* or the *Oedipus*, and the response of Athena's people to enlightened skepticism or liberal theology was swift and effective: expulsion or death.

Sophocles' *Oedipus* goes to the heart of the matter. Echoing the fashionable opinions of the Sophists, the king and queen question not only the accuracy of the oracles but even the gods themselves. In distress the chorus wonders, if aristocratic mockers like Oedipus and Jocasta could get away with challenging the gods, then why should they dance? Their question is sung and danced as part of a play that is part of the festival of Dionysus. Is there in fact any point to ritual, including the rituals that nourish literature, in a society that has lost its faith? Is it any accident that the most powerful writers of this faithless century have mostly been Christian believers—Eliot, Faulkner, Peguy, Ionesco, and Solzhenitsyn—to name only a few?

The main difficulty I have with nearly every lament over the fallen state of American letters is that it rarely goes far enough. I wonder if civilization really did march so steadily forward in the 20th century and only stumbled to its knees some time about 1968. Or is it just possible that the century of trench warfare, incendiary bombing, nuclear weapons, and genocide was something less than the Renaissance it has been made out to be? The still untold history of modernism is of the religious reactionaries who were so disgusted by the growing barbarism and decadence of *fin-de-siècle* Europe and America that they created new and wonderful pieces of art as so many weapons against progress. In the end, the weapons proved too complicated for their less-educated successors to handle—rather like hand-held missiles in the

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hands of our all-volunteer army. After six decades of modernism, we are left with the choice between the well-subsidized vandalism of the arts-and-letters establishment and some attempt to reclaim, and not for the first time in the history of our barbarian nation, our cultural inheritance. Going back a single generation, even if it were possible, would not be worth the effort.

The communal and religious spirit of the classics may represent an impossible ideal for anyone but a sentimental reactionary or a crazed Marxist, but Greek literature is there—if you can find someone to teach it to your children—as a perpetual reminder of what flawed humanity can achieve when we are bound together by ties of blood and ritual. It is also the very opposite of what most literary movements hope to achieve. Rather than dividing a people into artists and philistines, intellectuals and rednecks, great poetry bound an ancient community together in an art that could please high and low alike. Addressed to the most particular concerns of the city—a large number of Aristophanes' jokes are opaque even to scholars—these plays have become the most universal items in our cultural inheritance.

If it is this inheritance that the practitioners of formal and narrative verse are setting out to reclaim, they deserve every encouragement. The worst thing they could do is to form yet one more movement or clique, complete with slogans and heroes. Some, at least, of the polemics coming out of the formalists suggest just that, and it is not a good sign that many of them seem oblivious of all the good poetry—including narrative and formal verse—being written outside their circle. Still, the revival of real poetry comes like a leg of lamb after 40 days of fasting, and there is no point in quarreling, at this point, over the quality of the turnips being put around the roast. ◈

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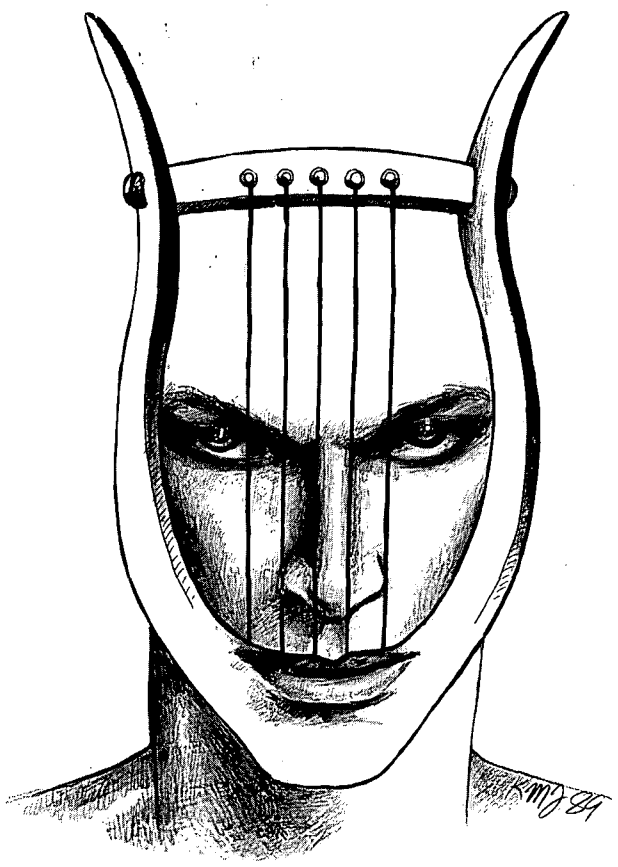

The Lyric of Tradition

by Donald Davidson

"The Lyric of Tradition" is an essay written nearly twenty-five years ago by the late Donald Davidson, celebrated American poet, critic, and philosopher of cultural change who developed, out of his own artistic practice, a comprehensive theory of the role of literature in a healthy society. It was a view not at all like those of his friends and fellow Fugitives, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, and Allen Tate; a view completely unrelated to the theory of alienation so important to almost all contemporary poetics. The essay is drawn from materials employed as part of a series of public lectures on the lyric given at Vanderbilt University in February and March of 1965—lectures that represented an early stage in Davidson's work on a book about the origins of English lyric which he began with his retirement from the faculty of Vanderbilt in June of 1964. He finished this lecture and almost finished one other before his death on April 25, 1968, but problems with health and a variety of writing obligations made the preparation (for Scribner's) of a monograph on the early lyric, the poetry of song, a task too large for the time and energy which he still had at his disposal. Had Davidson lived longer he would assuredly have added to the essay some of the special grace notes that are part of his finished style. Still, the argument as he intended it is present in these pages and deserves our attention as it stands.

It was the opinion of Professor Davidson that literary forms have an occasional or circumstantial character and that they are best explained by the purposes they are designed to serve. They are not by nature better suited to be heard, performed, or read by a coterie, set apart from other men and women by the refinement of their sensibility, but are more naturally directed to a larger audience representative of a cross section of a particular society. "Private poetry" was for him an oxymoron. For audience or writer, the "guarded style" was, he believed, frequently a questionable consequence of aestheticism and the cultic view of art as a quasi-religious experience. None of which is to say that Donald Davidson underestimated the mystery of all poetic making or took a purely functional view of his craft. For his vision of the poet as keeper of a communal memory, as vates *or uplifted singer functioning* within *the framework of a traditional society, is as high as anything ever imagined by Thomas or Yeats, Spenser, Wordsworth, or Milton. But it does not, according to what is now the fashion, presuppose the absolute isolation of the artist by the necessities of his art, or a poetry that is in its proper element only on the*

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printed page.

Since the time of Davidson's death there has been much critical attention to the special characteristics of the lyric poem as act and cultural gesture. But none of it quite supersedes the Tennessee poet's reflections on the origins of his calling and its ancient, indissoluble connections with music and song. In his system irony, eloquence, and dramatization have their place, but are not all *of poetry. "The Lyric of Tradition" should be compared to "Poetry as Tradition," the opening chapter in Davidson's most memorable book of criticism,* Still Rebels, Still Yankees *(1957), to Davidson's own verse, and to his commentary on the best of other modern poetry.*

—M.E. Bradford

The Middle Ages cannot be exactly delimited as a historical period. In her anthology, *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics*, Helen Waddell goes as far back as the poem "Copa Surisca" ("Syrian Dancing Girl"), attributed to Vergil by Servius in the fourth century A.D. and quoted in a ninth-century manuscript as well as in the Benedict-beuern manuscript of the 13th century now famous as the *Carmina Burana*. Miss Waddell explains this inclusion as "for the sake of the unbroken tradition." The "Copa" is not medieval in any usual sense. But the "Copa" and some lyrics of the Latin Silver Age illustrate the "line of descent" that allies medieval verse with the older tradition—with Ausonius, Petronius, and the unknown author of *Pervigilium Veneris*. Even so, Petronius "is closer to the first Italian sonnet writers than he is to Horace." But for Miss Waddell the medieval period ends with the year 1200 or thereabout.

For Sir Edmund Chambers, writing both of Old French, Middle English, and some Latin lyrics in "Some Aspects of Medieval Lyric," the Middle Ages go back into the indefinite realm of folk song and forward into the 16th-century beginnings of the English Renaissance. For George K. Anderson, writing of Anglo-Saxon and Middle English literature, the term "medieval" is similarly flexible and indefinite. "Within the framework of history, all English literature is either medieval or modern. To designate any part of it as medieval is to describe it, explicitly or implicitly, as belonging to the era that formed the great bridge over which the Western world advanced from the confusion following the collapse of Rome to the complex modern world."

Evidently the term "medieval lyric" will have a wavering kind of indefiniteness if we try to look at it in straight historical terms. A hymn to the Virgin Mary, a courtly love song, a ballade by Chaucer may be "placed" in the 14th century. But such placement tells us little about its actual poetical quality, still less about it as a lyric. What if we encounter a lyric by Wyatt or Surrey in the 16th century with much the same poetical characteristics as the 14th-century piece? Are we to think of it as "medieval"? Historically, it is "Renaissance."

If we reject the historical label as unsatisfactory for critical purposes, what will serve better?

It is helpful to consider the difficulties that have beset scholars in their attempts to place the "ballad" historically. To Bishop Percy the old poems that he took from the famous folio manuscript and other sources were mostly either "ballads" or "romances," and all were to his notion properly titled in his collection as *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. They were either the work of "minstrels"—and hence in our terms "medieval"—or of still more ancient "bards" and therefore in his terms "Gothic." By the time of Francis J. Child, a century and more later, the idea of popular origin and a slow development or even evolution through the workings of oral tradition took foremost place. English ballads *might* be medieval, but few documentary traces of medieval ballads could be salvaged. The title of Child's great collection very properly expresses a dominant theme of 19th-century scholarship: *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. But "popular" does not quite avail. Walter Scott's "literary" ballads, Byron's fashionable love lyrics, Burns' more homely "songs" were all popular in the sense of being immensely liked, indeed of being absorbed and possessed by the "people" if not by the "folk."

By 1932 ballad scholarship had passed into a new phase, and Gordon H. Gerould arrived at a more realistic and useful solution to the problem in his book *The Ballad of Tradition*. Here at last, in Gerould's discussion, the ballad is disengaged from its merely historical associations and studied as an art product that owes its distinction to certain social and cultural conditions. "The popular ballad," Gerould writes, "or the ballad of tradition as I believe we may more justly call it, has no real existence save when held in memory and sung by those who have learned it from the lips of others. . . . Strictly speaking, the ballad as it exists is not a ballad . . . until it has been in oral circulation. . . . For the ballad is a folk-song, and is subject to all the conditions of production and transformation peculiar to folk-song, though it is distinguishable in respect of content and purpose." Gerould's emphasis is on the "moulding" process of tradition as it shapes, or fails to shape, the ballad, and not on the nature of tradition itself or the traditional society, and he is still involved with that most ill-defined of critical and cultural terms, the "folk." But the very term "ballad of tradition" promises and indeed brings clarity and light into areas that have been as foggy as Poe's misty mid-region of Weir.

Is there also such a thing as the lyric of tradition? Without hesitation I would say yes. If "ballad of tradition" is a better term for the popular ballad than "folk ballad," and if, possibly, "story of tradition" might be a better name for popular story than "folk tale"—and I believe they are more sensible terms—then "lyric of tradition" is the right term for most of the English lyrics composed between the last stand of Harold in 1066 and the much less edifying death of Henry VIII in 1547. The term "folk lyric"—like "folk song," "folk tale," and "folk ballad"—involves any critic in the baffling mystique built up around the word *folk* by the enthusiastic yet fruitless efforts of anthropologists and literary scholars to force our more ancient stories and poems into a conjectural sequence that will somehow correspond with Darwin's theory of evolution. Since Herder came forth in 1771 with his tempting question, *War nicht Ossian unser Bruder?* and Wolf in 1795 issued his *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, "the folk" have had almost divine creative power attributed to them, but seem to flourish more in the realm of analogy and conjecture than of solid fact. George Lyman

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Kittredge of Harvard and other notable 19th-century scholars were impressed by the maxim attributed to Jakob Grimm: *Das Volk dichtet* ("The folk make poetry"). Perhaps so, we may now say, but only if Chaucer, Will Shakespeare, even Jack Donne may also be admitted on occasion to the sacred company of "the folk."

It is not easy to appreciate the lyric of tradition for what it really is. We are a bookish people. We find English medieval lyrics jammed in somewhere near the beginning of a large anthology or textbook that soon hastens on to Wyatt, Sidney, and Shakespeare and so along the regular historical line to Pope, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Keats, and Tennyson, with T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats at the book's end, surrounded by a scattering galaxy of moderns to constitute the rear guard that turns out to be a vanguard. The natural inclination then is to try to "read" a 13th-century lyric as we would "read" the later poetry. But what if the 13th-century lyric was intended to be sung, not read at all—though just possibly it might be read aloud, or memorized and spoken? It will be impossible to use a biographical approach, since the authors' names are rarely attached to a medieval lyric. No one will ever know whether the unidentified poet of the following 12th-century (or possibly 13th-century) lyric was unhappily married or was out of favor at Court or was merely suffering from an attack of gout:

Mirie it is while sumer ilast
With fugheles song;
Oc nu necheth windes blast
And weder strong.
Ei, ei, what this nicht is long!
And ich with wel michel wrong
Soregh and murne and fast.

(Merry it is while summer can last
With birds' song;
But now nigheth wind's blast
And weather strong.
Oh, oh, how this night is long!
And I with many a wrong
Sorrow and mourn and fast.)

We shall never know this or any other English medieval lyric for what it really is if we look at it only with the eyes and hear it only with the ears that are adjusted to the entirely literary standards and taste of the 20th century. Or, for that matter, of the 19th or 18th century, or any time subsequent to a date that might be fixed, say, in the later part of the 17th century. My choice would be for 1688, the year of the Glorious Revolution. In that year English Whigs and Tories agreed on the interesting fiction, suddenly developed as *ad hoc* political theory, that King James II, not they, was in rebellion against constituted authority. Whereupon they brought in William of Orange from the Netherlands, with an invading army, to throw out King James. From that moment the advent of literary modernism was guaranteed, no matter how lithely Pope might dribble couplets or Samuel Johnson thunder against the Chesterfields or MacPhersons. But the date might be set still earlier, even as early as the accession of Elizabeth in 1558. One must allow a century or more for the clock of tradition to run down—in good English style—from simply not being any longer wound up.

A word of caution is needed here about the word *lyric*. The great medieval scholars—E.K. Chambers, Carleton Brown, R.H. Robbins, and others—entitle their collections *Early English Lyrics*, *Religious Lyrics*, *Secular Lyrics*, and the like. But the medieval manuscripts or early printed books from which these editors drew their material do not use the term *lyric*. Apparently it was unknown to the authors of the poems, and it was not used by the learned or at least literate monks and friars to whose devotion we owe many important manuscripts of early English verse of various kinds. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites Sir Philip Sidney's use of *lyric* in 1581 as the earliest appearance of the word in English. In *The Defense of Poesy* Sidney says, for example, that he found "in the Earle of Surrey's Liricks, manie things tastting of a noble birth and worthie of a noble mind." The rhetoricians Webbe (in 1586) and Puttenham (in 1589) also use the word. But Richard Tottel, who published in 1557 the first *printed* anthology of English lyrics, entitles his historic collection *Songes and Sonettes Written by the Ryht Honorable Lorde Henry Haward late Earle of Surrey, and Other*. Tottel does not refer to these poems as "lyrics." In his admirably concise preface Tottel uses a homely phrase: "That to have written wel in verse, yea and in small parcelles, deserveth great praise, the workes of divers Latines, Italians, and other, doe prove sufficiently."

It is therefore an anachronism to apply the term *lyric* to the songs, complaints, ballades and "balets," roundels, epigrams, and other kinds of non-narrative poems originating during the Middle Ages or perhaps during at least the first half of the 16th century. The term *lyric*, as applied to such poems, owes its currency to the understandable enthusiasm of the Renaissance Humanists to imitate what they rather foggily conceived to be the Greek practice of singing poems to the accompaniment of the lyre. Since Renaissance musicians had no lyres—and would not have known how to tune lyres in true Greek fashion if they had had any—the lute had to serve as an equivalent. Ronsard in France urged a revival of "*l'usage de la lire aujourdui resucitée en Italie*" and boasted that he was responsible for the fashion of accompanying "odes" with the lute. Baif, his confrere in the Pleiade group, founded an Academy devoted specially to the unity of poetry and music in terms conceived to be derived from the Greek example. These early Academicians wished to explore the miraculous power of music when joined with poetry and pondered the Greek myths of how Orpheus moved beasts and even trees, as well as men, and how Amphion waltzed stones into place to form the walls of Thebes, all by the power of voice and lyre. Shakespeare, remembering such myths, provided Orpheus with a lute in his song for *Henry VIII*:

Orpheus with his *lute* made trees
And the mountaintops that freeze
Bow themselves when he did sing.

Poets and singers of the Middle Ages not only did not have the lyre; they did not have the lute, either. It became a popular instrument in the 16th century. Yet custom makes *lyric* an inescapable term. To ban it from this discussion would be as odd and inappropriate as to insist on calling an

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automobile a "horseless carriage." If the Middle Ages did not have lyre or lute, they had other instruments and sang often — much more often than we do — and with gusto or piety as the occasion invited.

The term *lyric* will serve well enough if we properly qualify its reference to the medieval lyric. To qualify it properly is to define the lyric of tradition as a kind of poem, not primarily narrative, that was commonly sung or recited, or at least read aloud — and in certain instances danced to, as well as sung. These uses strongly affect its diction, its structure, its total rhetoric, and easily distinguish it from the more literary poetry which we call modern, the poetry that is intended to be read in silence by the secluded individual. A poetry that is sung calls for listeners — who of course join in singing when the occasion becomes social, whether in the courtly hall, the tavern, or the village green. It was truly functional or applied art, intended for performance on recognized occasions — the liturgical or nonliturgical uses of the Church, public ceremonies, festivals; or in a less public sense, to lighten work, to influence conduct, to serve various practical needs of guildsmen, sailors, farmers. This kind of poem has a specific purpose in view: to compliment and if possible win the lady, according to the etiquette of courtly love; to mourn the dead; to praise the victor; to pass the time away in mirth or festivity; but above all to worship God, as in a hymn or sacred carol.

Such lyrics, most often by unknown authors, do not set out to be works of art. Nonetheless they turn out to be art, and when at their best — the art that William Butler Yeats praised and desired, in which, he said, "We cannot distinguish the handiwork of Scopas from that of Praxiteles . . . an art where the artist's handiwork would hide as under those half-anonymous chisels or as we find it in some old Scots ballad, or in some twelfth- or thirteenth-century Arthurian Romance."

If old Anglo-Saxon custom had dominated rather than the conquering Norman — that is, if some of the medieval poems that we call medieval lyrics were sung or chanted to the sound of the harp — then medieval England would in truth have had, and maybe did have, something close to or paralleling the Greek lyric as performed in ancient times. It would not have been anything that the Renaissance Humanist would have admired — though Sidney did once go so far as declare that he was moved by the performance of some "blinde crowder" singing "the old song of Percy and Douglas." The "crowd" or "Crouth" (Welsh "*Crwth*") was a relative of the lyre or harp, and Sidney heard what was in effect a "lyric" rendering of a traditional ballad.

The professional minstrel with his harp is no mere romantic fancy of Bishop Percy and Walter Scott. In England the harper survived well into the 16th century, and the sturdy prevalence of "Harper" as an occupational surname in America today perhaps suggests how firmly the ancient profession was planted in the mother country before the New Music came in along with the New Poetry. [A sampling of surnames in the telephone directory of a city of about 200,000 reveals 125 Harpers as compared with 49 Shepherds (Shepards), 49 Carpenters, and 26 Joiners (Joyners). The Smiths and Cooks are of course much more numerous.] Harpers were retained by royalty and nobility as a matter of custom, but more out of inertia than preference, we may suspect. A blind harper named More was chief harper under four sovereigns of England, including Henry VIII. The rhetorician Puttenham records that, even in the time of Elizabeth, romances were recited to the strumming of the harp. He himself had composed a "historical ditty . . . to be more commodiously songe to the harpe in places of assembly, where the company shall be desirous to heare of old adventures and valiaunces of noble knights in times past."

We get a lively picture of harp-playing for lesser folk in a 15th-century carol of the convivial type. The "gossips" — waiting until their husbands are safely out of the house — gather at a tavern. Each one brings a dish — some of "flesh," some of "fish." Then Margery makes a wish: "I wold that Frankelyne the harper were here." Suddenly, by remarkable coincidence, he is:

She hade notte so sone the word isayd
But in come Frankelyn at a brayd;
"God save you, masteres," he sayde;
"I come to make youe some chere."

Anon he began to draw out his harpe;
Then the gossyppes began to starte;
They callyd the tawyrner to fyll the quarte
And lette note for no coste.

Then seyd the gossyppes all in fere,

Cor Ne Edito

by William M. Galbraith

Voracious dragonflies
consume their afterparts.
The hoop snake tries
and tries with fits and starts
to eat from tail to ears
until it disappears.

Of what things that are fair
and of a goodliness,
partake of them; care
that beauty be never less
but, taken, becomes more
than ever was before.

This is a good hunger . . .
But whet upon the tongue
no taste for being younger
as when you walked along
glad boulevards of art.
Eat not your heart.

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"Streke vp, harper, and make gode chere,
And wher that I goo, fere or nere,
To owre husbondes make thou no [boste."]

"Nay, mastres, as motte I thee,
Ye schall newyr be wrayed for me;
I had leuer her dede to be,
As hereof to be knowe."

They fylled the pottes by and by;
They lett not for no coste trully;
The harpyr stroke vpe merrely,
That they myght onethe blowe.

So the gossips dance and drink. When the time comes to add up the "scot" and go home, they find that their merriment has been quite costly—sixpence each. They go home by roundabout ways and later tell their husbands that they have been to church.

We know little in an exact musical sense about harp music and its uses. The notation of music developed slowly and for a long time was almost entirely a craft of the church musicians, the only musicians who were both learned and, in a sense, professional. The surviving manuscripts of medieval church music far outnumber the few manuscripts of secular songs with musical notation. As for harp music—if it was notated—practically nothing survives. Gustave Reese, in his *Music in the Middle Ages*, refers to only one manuscript of harp music—a manuscript in the British Museum "containing Welsh harp music, reputedly of great antiquity." Reese also interprets a passage in Caesar's *Gallic Wars* as meaning that the Druid bards of the Continent forbade the writing down of the "verses" that they taught in their "schools." Their students must rely on memory alone. The use of letters would allow their art and wisdom to pass into vulgar hands. The art of singing to the harp—or playing the harp for dances—remained in the oral tradition, like the art of the "old-time fiddler" or of the bagpipes, Scottish or Irish.

There is of course no lack of references to the harp and other instruments and to singing and dancing in the literature of the Middle Ages. Chaucer's Friar was an amateur harper—

And in his harpyng, whan that he hadde songe,
His eyen twynkled in his heed aryght,
As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght.

The Clerk Nicholas of "The Miller's Tale" played the psaltery and sang *Angelus ad virginem* so "sweetly that all the chamber rang," and after it sang "The King's Note"; his rival Absolon sang in a very high tenor (perhaps a falsetto or "countertenor") to the accompaniment of "a smal rubible" or rebeck. The Franklin "had in remembrance"—that is, could recite from memory—a Breton "lai," and Chaucer makes him say in "The Franklin's Prologue" that these "layes with hir instrumentz they songe / Or elles redden hem for hir pleasaunce" (that is, read them out loud to a listening company).

But this oral tradition was much older than Chaucer's time and had deeper roots and wider provenience than we might suspect from a study of Chaucer's courtly productions, which are literary in the then-new French manner even while they remain sturdily English in so many impressive ways. The medieval romance "King Alisaunder" epitomizes the whole cultural situation in two lines:

Mery hit is in halle to here the harpe
Theo mynstral syngith, theo jogolour carpith.

The "audience" in the great hall includes all "degrees," not only the king and the nobility but other persons of the feudal community, whether of palace, castle, or manor house. Even monasteries at certain times might invite the minstrel to sing or recite. The tale that is "told" is sung to the harp in the earlier stages; or it may be recited; and later, when the tale (that is, the "romance") is written down, it finally comes to be read out. We should not confuse the minstrel of earlier times, who may himself be the bard or creative poet, with the beggarly entertainers of a later time when books and broadsides have begun to exert their modern influence. The lyric of tradition was produced—like the romance, ballad, and mystery play—in a cultural situation like that described by John Speirs in his discussion of alliterative romances and poems:

> There is ample evidence not only that in the early communities poetry was oral but that there was a class of men, highly honoured by nobles and kings for their skill and insight, whose whole occupation in life was poetry, and who composed and recited long poems which they did not write down and many of which were never written down.

What we know, then, with complete certainty, is that the lyric poets, as we call them, of the Middle Ages, even in the decline of the medieval culture, do not set out to compose "poems." They make *songs* for definite and rather practical

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The poetry of tradition has a place in life, a use in life; it is not a fancy thing, not a luxury, not a toy, not sheer entertainment.

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purposes. The purposes may be lofty—as in a hymn or laude for Christ, the Virgin, or a saint; or merely jovial, as in a drinking song for the tavern; or useful, as in the traditional rhyme for remembering the number of days in the 12 months. Exceedingly popular was Lydgate's rhymed catalog, "The Kings of England"—15 stanzas in rhyme royal, laboriously arranging the monarchs from William of Normandy to Henry VI. Robbins reports this menace to the medieval schoolboy's happiness as being found in 46 manuscripts. Briefer was the medical student's rhymed helper for remembering teeth, bones, and veins:

XXXII teth that bethe full kene,
CCbonys and Nyntene,
CCC vaynys syxty and fyve,
Euery man hathe that is alyve.

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Or, for anybody and everybody, rhymed verses will preserve the proverbs and wise sayings that guide conduct:

Drah thyn hond sone ayen,
yf men the doth a wycke theyn,
ther thyn ahte ys lond.
So that child with draweth is hond
From the fur & the brond,
that hath byfore bue brend.
"Brend child fur dredeth,"
Quoth Hendyng.

(Draw back thy hand quickly again
If a man doeth thee some wicked thing,
When thine own is lent.
So doth the child withdraw his hand
From the fire and from the brand.
"Burnt child fire dreadeth,"
Quoth Hendyng.)

Today we speak of Chaucer's "poems." Chaucer himself speaks of writing "tales," or, at the end of "The Parson's Tale," in his famous "Retraction," he refers to his "translacions and enditynges of worldly vanitees" and—after listing his various works—he includes (not his "lyrics") but "many a song and many a leccherous lay." He does not labor to distinguish between "poetry" and "prose." The distinction for him is between prose and rhyme. "Poesie" for Chaucer—if the "epilogue" to *Troilus and Criseyde* can be taken as good authority for his view—meant poetry in its larger dimensions: epic, romance, dream-vision, or else literature in its dramatic and fictional aspects as contrasted with history and philosophy. This is what he seems to be saying when he prays that his "litel bok"—

But subgit be to alle poesye;
And kis the steppes, where as thow seest pace
Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.

Thus Chaucer is drawing away from, and even "outside," the oral tradition in the sense that he is composing both his narrative poems and his small and less distinguished group of lyrics in the "new" and more literary manner of Guillaume de Machaut and other contemporaries on the Continent. Still Chaucer had an "audience"—as poets in later bookish times have not had—a true audience that could *hear* his poems read aloud—and possibly even sung, although we have no medieval settings of any of Chaucer's "lyrics." And there was also for him an "audience" in the modern figurative sense: the quite small "audience" of silent readers who might be wealthy enough to own manuscript copies or lucky enough to get access to them in other ways. Chaucer himself—again in the "Epilogue" to *Troilus and Criseyde*—speaks of this long poem as being "read . . . or else sung." Professor Arthur K. Moore, in his valuable discussion of these alternatives, so puzzling to the modern student, suggests that Chaucer may here be reflecting the preference advanced by Eustache Deschamps in his *L'Art de dictier* (1392) for *musique naturele* (recitation in the natural speaking voice) over *musique artificiele* (the singing voice, no doubt with instrumental accompaniment). Most likely *Troilus and Criseyde* was intended to be read aloud and was a "song" only in a metaphorical sense. The reading must have been for a social group, large or small, like that indicated by Chaucer himself when he depicts Pandarus as coming on a May morning "unto his niece's place":

And fond two othere ladys sete, and she,
Withinne a paved parlour, and they thre
Herden a mayden reden hem the geste
Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste.

But the inescapable influence of the oral tradition is more obvious in the familiar example of *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer must pretend that the Pilgrims actually *told* their tales—in his excellent verse, too—and that all listened while the lengthy procession took the road to the shrine of the "holy, blissful martyr," amidst clopping of hoofs and jingling of bridles, at a little better than a footpace. Incredible, to a modern! How could the tale-teller be heard? How could the Pilgrims comment back and forth? Possibly the big-mouthed Miller or the obnoxious Summoner could be heard from one end of the column to the other, though even they would have to shout somewhat in the manner of the old-fashioned cavalry captain to his troop. But what of the gentle Prioress or the stately Knight? Yet in many bits of dramatic by-play Chaucer insists on the actuality as well as the dramatic realism of the tale-telling, with all its varied interruptions. Such, then, was the power of the oral tradition.

It is safe to conclude that the lyric of tradition flourishes under—and indeed requires—much the same cultural milieu that our modern scholars visualize as favorable to the ballad of tradition. It is by no means a "primitive" milieu, though it may retain, as even our supposedly distilled and pasteurized modern society does, many remnants of its ancient and prehistoric experience. In England it is the culturally stable feudal society of the Middle Ages that we are concerned with—a society that, being Christian, shared in the basic convictions about God, man, and nature that made Christendom a reality in those times.

A good deal of what is now being said about the ballad of tradition and about folk song applies to the lyric of tradition. If the ballad is a story told in song, the lyric of tradition is a poem of non-story character, descriptive, meditative, often but not invariably concentrated and dramatic, which like the ballad uses the combination of verse with music, but can also resort to declamation alone. At the popular level the lyric often circulates in oral tradition, as does the ballad. If it is "popular in origin," it can be thought of as "folk song." Its anonymity of authorship and its impersonal nature tempt modern readers to make that kind of classification. But origins are too often mere conjecture. They lead into labyrinths of speculation where one may wander forever. The lyric of tradition may often with much greater security be identified as "popular by destination," as Richard Leighton Greene in his *Early English Carols* argues many carols to be. In such case it is not "folk song" exactly, or is a different order of "folk song" from the other kind.

Whatever its origin, it depends upon individual memory and social acceptance for its diffusion and ultimate survival, if it circulates at the popular level. At that level its chances for being written down are relatively slight—slighter even than the chances of the ballad, since it does not generally

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have the eternal and universal attraction of *story* as does the ballad. For this reason the great mass of the popular songs of medieval times are lost to us, or—as Sir Edmund Chambers puts it—"There must have been popular songs . . . for [Chaucer's] Absolon to sing to his rudible, but edacious time has reduced them to tantalizing fragments."

But medieval lyric belongs also to the Church and the Court—above all to the Church—and not merely to the people as an abstract mass. So the lyric of these times is a written lyric to some considerable extent and thus has been preserved, however scatteringly, in documents. It has not been so completely subject, as the ballad has been, to the accidents and vagaries of oral tradition. In the hands of writers like Chaucer and the Scottish "Chaucerians" it becomes "literary" poetry and achieves a new status. Even so, it remains in some essential features the lyric of tradition. It is still pre-Renaissance, prescientific, preindustrial. Most important of all, it precedes the age of printing—of the printed book and the broadside sheet. It belongs to a society that even in its decline was still in many ways traditional and therefore culturally nearer to the northern Europe of the Eddas and sagas—or perhaps ancient Greece—than to the mechanized society of our time. In that older society the high place of poetry was conceded, as today it is not.

The poetry of tradition is rooted in human occupations as they are pursued from dawn to dark, from season to season, on land and sea, through harvest and winter, in war or peace. It is associated with festivals and rituals, both sacred and secular; and the distance between sacred and secular is not forbiddingly immense, as in our modern times. It is an art designed for oral performance, preserved in human memory and the oral tradition that also preserves ballad and folk song; and maybe it is lost for that very reason. And even when written by known poets, great poets indeed, it still reflects the standards and qualities of a poetry sung or spoken rather than a poetry read with the eye only. It has a place in life, a use in life; it is not a fancy thing, not a luxury, not a toy, not sheer entertainment—though it has the faculty, all the same, in Sidney's phrase, of holding children from play and old men from the chimney corner. It is a recognized function of civilized life, and the lyric of the Middle Ages, more than other literary forms, is "functional" in the favorable sense given to that term in modern times.

Above all it is part of the continuity of life—the tie that binds generation to generation. We should not forget, too, that it joins with the great tradition of Western civilization—the classic tradition. We can know from it—distant though we may be from those times—what that tradition means as a nonbookish, even nonliterary element in our life.

When the poet of the Renaissance rejected "medievalism" in favor of the New Poetry of the 16th century, he may be said to have improved the "art" of poetry. But it would now seem that he did so at the cost, ultimately, of alienating the poetic art and himself from the mainstream of public and private life. Thus, while declaring the primacy of poetry, as Sidney did, he unknowingly voted for its subordination. ◈

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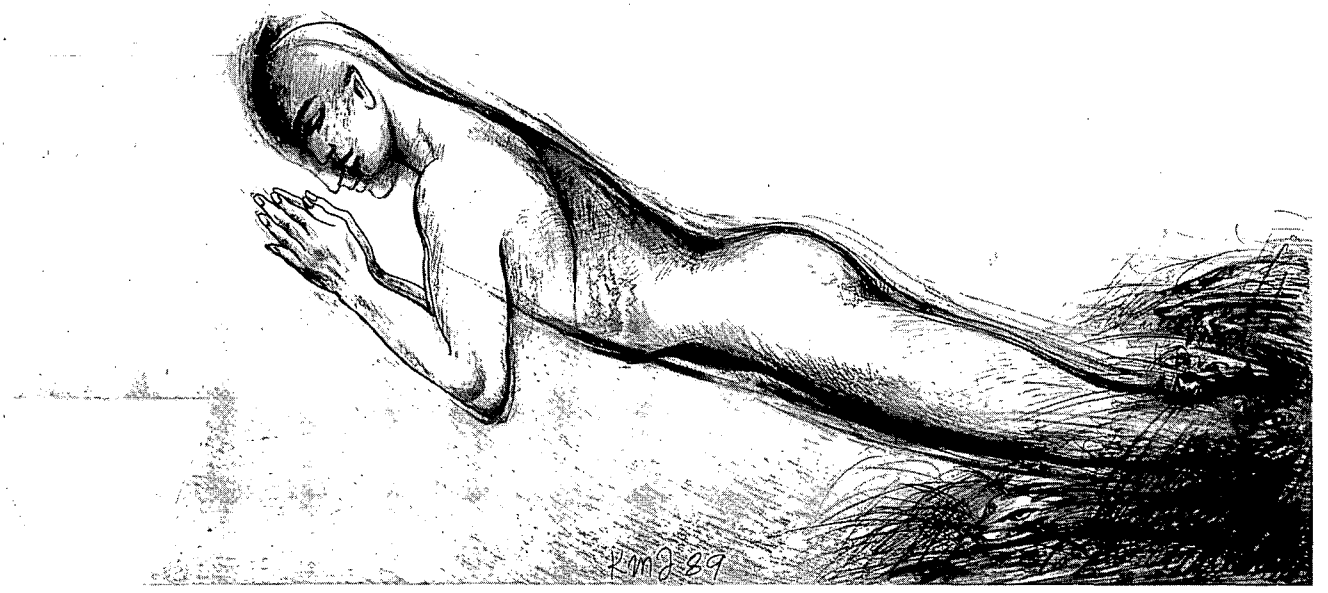
An Imitation

A Short Story

by William Mills

"It behoveth thee to be a fool for Christ."
—Thomas à Kempis



Hawkins was doing his version of an Iranian student who had missed eight weeks of class, yet wanted an "A" in the calculus course.

"I know you are vondering why I have not to come to class since school start. I am good student. You can tell. But I am only support of my wife, my brother, my mother, and now my cousins from Iran. I must work all the time."

"It must be hard. Maybe you ought to drop out. You've missed all the quizzes."

"Oh, I can never do it. I must graduate in three years. Absolutely. I have had calculus in high school. It is very easy for me."

"I understand. But you've never been to class and never taken any quiz. You've got an 'F' as of right now."

"I was really hoping for an 'A.'"

Hawkins' Iranian accent was perfect and the people at the party howled in laughter. His face could change radically and with great rapidity. One moment he could be Mussolini, posturing before his troops, the next a ghetto kid playing basketball. He became these people. While he was an undergraduate he had done stand-up comedy in small nightclubs. After his own schooling was completed, he taught mathematics at the University of Houston, and now he was teaching math at the medical school.

He was envied and admired by the young, upwardly mobile professionals in his set in Houston. The surgeons made more money, but none of them seemed to have such a good time as Hawkins. Lately, he was envied even more because he had the freedom that followed the breakup of his marriage. No one said this, but the surgeons and lawyers still had to have their affairs on the run, in secret. Hawkins was having the time of his life right before their very eyes. Or so they thought. He still had his five-year-old 450 SL convertible. His former wife got the house, but he had moved into one of those opulent apartment complexes that try to simulate Caribbean resort hotels. A great plastic dome covered the pool and Jacuzzis, and the recreational area, the Pleasure Dome, looked like part of the Amazon rain forest airlifted in.

Yet with the jazzy apartment, sports car, and plenty of money from his job, Hawkins lived with a low-frequency anxiety just underneath all that he thought and did. He felt as if his life had no pattern, that it might have been assembled from different suppliers scattered around the country by someone who had never seen a man before.

He left the party with his latest love, a chesty physical therapist who was into cats and computers. She was trying to work out the physics of a new routine to help a male patient stand more upright by lying on his back and doing some

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Poet and novelist William Mills is currently visiting writer at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

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new exercises. She had come to Hawkins for help. He helped her into bed.

This night, after the usual frenzy, he lay awake while she dozed. Her giant, tail-less Manx cat sat on the nearby chest of drawers and stared at him. He looked as big as a bobcat. Staring. The hard eyes made Hawkins feel like the stranger he was in this bedroom. He finally dozed for a few minutes, only to be awakened by the cat when it lunged on the bed and began pawing Hawkins' foot under the sheet. He kicked the cat off the bed and hurriedly put on his clothes, as he explained to the startled therapist that he needed to get home.

◆

Hawkins remained quiet for a moment and then a shudder passed through him. His whole countenance changed, as the skin drew tightly across his facial bones, and the perspiration broke out on his forehead.

◆

Three days later he came down with rheumatoid gonorrhea. His knees and elbows had swelled and he began to feel not very upwardly mobile. While he was undergoing treatment, he couldn't drink, and he found himself loading up with ice cream at the nearby Baskin-Robbins. This led him to much solitary introspection. It was while browsing through the Praline-Pecan, the Mocha Chocolate, and the Paradise Pineapple that he ran into a quiet, brown-eyed woman who also lived in his complex. She lacked the glamorous look that would have made her a target of Hawkins. Now, given the judgment that had fallen upon him, given his dark remorse, he was not feeling so glamorous himself. Thus began his relationship with Monica.

Since sex was out of the question, Hawkins began for the first time to talk to a woman with no intention of seducing her. In the evenings after his classes at the medical school he would stroll over to her apartment, where she usually busied herself cooking an evening meal. By then she had slipped out of her secretary clothes and into jeans, looking like the East Texas farm girl she was. Her parents had urged her to learn typing, believing it would end up being worth more than the high school diploma, so maybe she wouldn't have to stay on the farm. Frankly, she liked the farm, but her father felt this was a step up.

For Hawkins, who had grown up in Chicago, Monica was as exotic as a Guatemalan Indian. He kidded her ways and speech as she fixed them field peas and cornbread and on a weekend even her version of East Texas barbeque. The peas had come from her father's garden. Hawkins would do his version of a hick farmer and Monica would smile and keep on cooking. It came to him that the plainness of the food and even the unadorned healthiness of Monica were just what drew him, what kept him there. She had a strong body and good legs which were more apparent when she was in her jeans. Around her small waist she wore a western belt with a large silver buckle. She carried herself with a vitality that was self-restrained, bounded. He carried the painful reminder of the women who hung out in all the clubs full of designer plants and designer pants. A darkness had, in fact, moved in even before the gonorrhea. He was not sure of the cause . . . maybe it was just leaving his wife. When he had found no one else who seemed to suit him, he fell into a state of drift. He drifted among a woman with a cat, a woman with a membership in a tennis club, and a medical student trying to improve her grade.

Late one evening as he sat at poolside, his feet dangling in the water, he heard, "OK, Hawkins, what's this story I hear you're hustling a Christer. I knew you were kinky, but this sounds like reverse kinky."

His wise-cracking friend Barolo backstroked down the pool to where he sat. Barolo had had the typical reaction to Hawkins' misfortune with the gonorrhea. He had laughed. Hawkins was irritated by this, but guessed he would have done the same, though if someone caught the flu nobody laughed in his face. He remembered that in the Army everyone howled when someone got the clap. Some applause! A scholar draftee volunteered that the word "clap" came from Old French, from brothel and venereal sore. Nowadays it looked like the whole city was a brothel.

Barolo heaved himself from the pool and as he sat next to Hawkins the water streamed down through the hair of his chest and legs. "So what's this taking up with a fanatic?" he cackled.

"I don't have anything else to do. Besides, she's a nice girl. She plays the organ at church. When's the last time you went out with a nice girl?"

"Ha. You'll see to her corruption. Wait'll the church elders get on to you. They'll see you in the stocks and lashed till you bleed."

"I met some of them once. They're not so bad. Most of them are insurance salesmen or real estate brokers."

"Right. A good place to make business contacts. So . . . you've even been hanging out at church."

Just then the resident manager dimmed the lights in the Pleasure Dome. It was eleven o'clock. In the false twilight they continued to talk.

"Yeah, I've been visiting the natives. Monica invited me to go and I don't mind. It's like doing anthropology in some exotic place."

"Watch out you don't go native. It's happened to some anthropologists. They start out with a kind of *noblesse oblige* and before you know it they've married the chief's daughter or shaman's son and they're there for the duration. They're as misguided as Rousseau, that oaf."

Hawkins knew he could expect an edge on anything Barolo might say about Christians. For Barolo had been one. Born one, raised one. Then he turned away. Not forty-five degrees, but one hundred and eighty. Hawkins had nothing in his experience that was much like that. He grew up believing in baseball. His father had died when Hawkins was still in junior high and he had gone to church with his mother for the funeral. He had been into another church when he had gotten married. That was his wife's idea. She didn't go to church either, but she couldn't have all the show, the bridesmaids, the reception—a real feed after the ceremony with caviar, champagne, and the works—without doing the whole thing. It was like getting in costume for a

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school play. He knew, though, that Barolo, as a matter of principle, wouldn't walk into a church. Give him a few drinks and he could get fired up and rolling. At a party one night someone rattled his cage and he could be heard above everyone else: "Leap of faith, leap of faith. What they don't tell you is you could just as easily land on Ra the Sun God or Quetzalcoatl! All they really mean is tyranny of the local. It's like a Soviet election. One candidate."

Hawkins smiled to himself as he thought of that evening, and he smiled outwardly now, glad to have this odd, witty companion in a town where he didn't have many friends who could be witty or serious about anything except their latest tennis racquet, their newest restaurant find. What Hawkins found pleasing was the serious way he was funny, the serious world he was laughing about, his slanted wit slipping through the world in ways most people never imagine. While the jokes occasionally were tinged with a slight bitterness, it was from the kind of integrity one expected in mathematics, but was much harder to maintain in the world outside of numbers. The world of contingency outside of numbers was one where a husband and wife could betray each other, the domain of gonorrheas.

Somehow to become one with his friend's mind, Hawkins began to talk in the accents of a Protestant TV preacher, as if he were offering a gift to Barolo for his company. "We are gathered together tooodaaay here in Gawwwd's House to give thanks for living in this gret country of ours. Let us remember our fighting men who guard our freeedooms as we approach this Easter season." Soon Barolo was grinning, relishing a guy from Chicago who had the ear for East Texas or, better, Big Thicket Protestant.

"I got to watch you religious types," he said. "You've commercialized Easter with chocolate rabbits and chicken eggs. Soon you'll be turning to my one big American holdout, Thanksgiving. Porcelain gift turkeys that lay candy eggs or else eight red-nosed turkeys, 'On Hobble, On Gobble,' will be flying down my chimney demanding my damn credit card before they'll leave anything."

"Gawwwd giveth or taketh away, but no credit," rejoined Hawkins.

One day late in February, a false spring day but full of promise, Monica invited Hawkins out to a Big Thicket dinner at the family farm. Her home was not some sprawling ranch house, but a clean, well-kept frame house with big porches front and back. The barns were close by, with an ample garden space, now mostly with the remains of winter vegetables like turnips and collards separating them from the house. His northern accent drove home that he was a stranger, but he was Monica's friend and so he was taken right in by the weather-lined father and the tanned, plump mother, and by Monica's two rough teenage brothers. Straightaway the brothers had him out at one of the barns looking at their cutting horses, both wearing hats as big as umbrellas, their jeans, belts, and boots following a dress code as rigid as a Marine guard's.

At midday dinner the table top was jammed with food, with lots more on a sideboard. A big hen with cornbread dressing occupied the center, but fanned out below this mountain of glazed tawniness were great foothills of field peas, potato salad, a huge round of cornbread, flanked by a barbequed ham with links of pork sausage around it, a giant white boat of gravy, a hummock of rice and a quivering mound of cranberry jelly looking nervous before what was to come. Monica's father asked God to bless all this opulence, thanking Him at the same time for their guest, and even though Hawkins felt self-conscious being singled out for God's notice, he felt like he had been made welcome.

Halting long enough to give God his due, Monica's rambunctious brothers put on an eating display that would have stirred the envy of the Aga Khan. Hawkins generally had salad at most for lunch and even before the apple pie and ice cream arrived he was reeling. Fortunately, nothing was expected of him after this ritual feast except to sip strong coffee in a rocking chair on the front porch while the brothers put on a riding display in the front yard. How they managed it so soon after dinner Hawkins could not imagine.

On the long drive back to Houston, facing a setting sun, he felt how important such gatherings had become, especially now. This family's daughter had gone off to the jungle of Houston to make her solitary way, far from the vortex of the family, partly because her father felt she would be better off there. No doubt because he felt the labor wouldn't be as hard. Hawkins wondered how good the trade had been, swapping harder work for the loneliness of the city. He felt that he was losing his trust in progress.

As he recalled the parting scene with Monica's family in the yard, watching them leave for the city, it seemed like a classical frieze on some temple, or an old photograph from an earlier time in America—the weathered couple in plain dress, as if they had been together from the beginning of time, and offered to time to come their cowboy sons astride their mounts, ready to shoot it out with death if he dared to show his face. How had he, Hawkins, smart guy from Chicago, failed to figure out the right moves? He had been fast on his feet. What had been missing?

His Mercedes sports coupe swept into a darkening Houston. The outskirts were filled with drilling equipment sitting idle from an oil boom gone bust. Row upon row of thrown-up apartment complexes were vacant or abandoned. A dying city. Near the interstate highway, from the broken

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window of an abandoned house, a curtain blew outside as if to wave goodbye.

Monica's church decided to put on a play, to be performed the week before Easter. At supper one evening she shyly asked him if he would be in it. Since there would be so many male parts, to start with 12 disciples plus Jesus, they were running short of grown men in their 20's and 30's. Hawkins was momentarily stopped, but after a minute he began to think what a funny idea that was, him playing one of the disciples.

The next evening the two of them went to the big room in the "education" center near the main church building, where there were many small classrooms and one central hall with a raised platform. When necessary, this could be turned into a makeshift stage, but the actual performance would be in the church auditorium.

After a little milling around, the youth director, a bald yet youngish-looking man, called out in a prissy way for them to gather round. "A good group, a good group. We're going to have lots of fun and we're going to put on a really good show." He swelled with self-importance. One might have thought he was directing a Hollywood cast of thousands rather than the few who would carry out the intimate drama of the last night before the Crucifixion.

All but Hawkins were known to the director, although he had seen him once on an earlier Sunday when he had come with Monica. The roles of ten disciples were promptly handed out to the men best known to the director, and for the first time Hawkins learned that there were two Simons, Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot. Most of the others had not known it either. Hawkins discovered that there had been two Judases, too! And Judas, the son of James, was given to the other remaining actor.

"Oh, dear, I do hope you won't mind playing Judas Iscariot," fluttered the director, looking at Hawkins.

Monica laughed, uneasily. "I didn't prepare him for something like this."

"It's OK, it's OK. It's only a play," Hawkins said.

"Well, I guess that leaves me to play Jesus," the director said, resigned. "So. A word about costumes. We won't wear our modern clothes, but since we don't have wigs available, we'll just have to do without. Anyone wanting to grow a beard, or borrow one, that's fine." He handed out the typed scripts. "Let's just run through it once tonight so you'll know what to expect. You can learn your lines at home."

Hawkins followed the plot with great interest. He knew generally how things went, but none of the specifics. Like the two Simons and the two Judases. The cast practiced breaking invisible bread and drinking invisible wine from a common cup. Hawkins thought he might have the best part. Simon Peter was a pretty good one, too.

Judas could have come straight out of a Chicago Mafia movie, Hawkins thought. He goes over to another family, the chief priests and scribes, and cuts a deal to set up his own godfather. They tell him when they want it: not on a holiday (bad press). Judas goes back to his own family and as he drinks wine with his godfather, the godfather looks him right in the eye and hints that he knows something is going down. One of the troubles Hawkins had staying in character was this prissy, balding Jesus.

Still, Hawkins was interested in his part. It always seemed like bad guys in the movies—in life for that matter—seemed to be more interesting. Like bad women. Hard to explain.

For the next week he thought a lot about Judas. Even though the little play had the same plot year after year with no revisions, he figured it was a good idea to read up on it. One of the confusing aspects of the story, and of the parts played by Judas and Peter, was Jesus telling them what they were going to do before they did it, kind of giving away the end. But then everybody knew the end of the play anyway. At first his notion was that knowing the end made it unrealistic. But as he pondered over this and Judas' betrayal, it came to him that the plot of everybody's life was rather similar if you took the high points: birth, growth, and death. Everyone knew the ending, just like Jesus'. It was just not knowing the timing. About all one could do was consider the style that would be his own. Judas no doubt considered himself a flexible kind of guy, one who could change grounds pretty quick, looking out for the main chance. It wasn't like the town hadn't thought he was doing a useful thing. He was going to get himself a little piece of land with the money, sort of God's little acre, Hawkins laughed. Starting over.

Slowly Hawkins thought he was getting into Judas' head. It took a lot of individuality to do what Judas did. Like some sort of Cold War spy who had to operate mostly alone, be his own man.

All went smoothly until the youth director ended up in the hospital. It was discovered he had a hole in his heart and would have to have an operation. Hawkins got this news from Monica one evening and she seemed much flustered about what would happen to the play. She talked to the minister and he said perhaps he could fill in with the directing chores, but that he didn't feel he ought to be playing Jesus. It ought to be someone from the congregation. When Monica approached a fellow from the Young Adult Sunday School class, he said he didn't want to play Jesus either, but he would play one of the disciples if they were hard pressed. Hawkins saw it coming, like a slow curve headed into the stands, then turning straight for home plate where he stood.

"Who? Me?"

"We're really in a jam and I don't know who else can save us." Monica's big brown Texas eyes pleaded with him.

When his friend Barolo dropped by again, he howled.

"I warned you about going native, didn't I? I have to admit even I didn't think you would go this far. This clap must have gone to your head."

"I knew you'd take it well," Hawkins grinned.

"I thought this was just a way to stay around your new chick, but I think you're caught. Just think of all that good scientific education going down the tubes."

"I'm just helping these people out. Maybe they recognize good acting talent."

"Hollywood couldn't get big name actors to play that spectacle about Jesus several years ago. Had to get an unknown. There's a danger in starting at the top. Kind of hard for people to take an actor seriously playing one of the Three Stooges once they've seen him play God."

"Only half God."

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"Listen to the new theologian. Tell me, old buddy, how do you square all this magic with yourself."

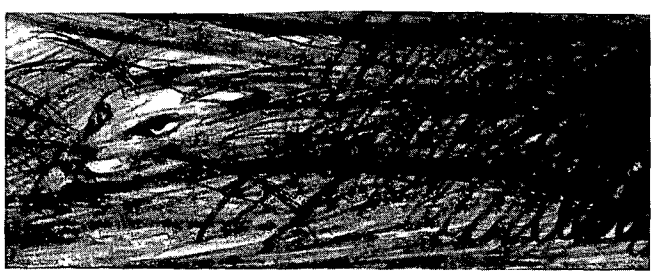
"I'm just doing a little archaeology. Can't hurt anything. Besides, I still get Monica," he grinned, raising his eyebrows like Groucho Marx, and tapping his imaginary cigar.

"Just a little empirical reconnaissance, huh? Trying to get a little certainty, is that it? You'd be better off doing your science if certainty's what you hunger for."

"That's getting to be a laugh and you know it. You should have learned from your boys Poincaré and Gödel that science rests on assumptions like everything else. These assumptions are just convenient, just conventional. Of course, we can't go around telling the uninitiated that. They'd find out what charlatans we are."

"So you're ready to substitute the blood of the Lamb for the axioms of mathematics, is that it? You're a queer one, Hawkins."

The closer Hawkins drew to the actual performance, the more the part of Jesus occupied his thoughts. He was not used to doing serious parts. Irony, cracking wise, impersonation had been his strong suit. Besides, he hadn't had any professional training. In college he had practiced with a buddy for their comic routines. His timing was meshed with the other's response. He could give tips to his partner and vice versa. A hand gesture, a drooping clown's mouth of sadness, a double take. But here he was alone.



Part of Hawkins' difficulty was getting into the head of his character. Judas had been a lot easier. He just put himself in the place of the Mafia stoolie and went from there. But how did you get into the head of God, or half-God, or whatever this mysterious combination was. Soon he was pouring over the conflicting accounts in the Gospels in the evening with Monica. Like many who had grown up in the church, Monica knew the general story, but she had a hard time answering the questions Hawkins was asking. For her, the story was not a mental problem, something to be taken apart and looked at in pieces. The story was as much a part of her as the sounds and smells of the church sanctuary, of Easter and Christmas. He was pursuing this like research at the medical school. He wanted specific details about background. Monica borrowed several biblical commentaries, and soon Hawkins was over his head in abstruse arguments about the text.

What did Judas actually do? Did he identify Jesus to the police or had he given the Sanhedrin inside dope about Jesus' secret claim to be the Messiah? Was the Last Supper a day before Passover? Hawkins was swamped in minutiae. It happened that way in his school research sometimes. He had to back off and try to remember where he really wanted to go.

He focused on this group as oriental men who had been together through hard times and who were meeting to break bread in an upstairs room. This tight circle would break apart within hours. Hawkins tried to think of instances of betrayal in his own life. Like when his wife and he betrayed each other but nothing was said, nothing was acknowledged. Jesus knew that Judas was going to turn stoolie on him, and that his good friend Simon Peter would take a walk when they accused him of being a friend of Jesus'. Hawkins began practicing his face, a face that would carry all the sadness in his eyes.

Besides this Hawkins concentrated on the garden scene. During the day, Jesus had been preaching in town, but at the end of each day he liked to get away from the noise and crowds to a place on nearby Mount of Olives, a small garden called Gethsemane. After supper on this last night, he did the same, and it caught Hawkins' attention that he anticipated what was going to happen back in town, that he was torn between what he might have to do, and the hope that there was some other way. That he was not sure. There was real anxiety here. Hawkins could get into that. Jesus dreaded going ahead, because he was not absolutely certain that this was what he needed to do.

Monica had in the meantime made her version of what a Palestinian would have worn during the time of the play. One evening she had asked Hawkins to let her pin the cut-out material on him in order to get the right fit. As she moved around him tucking here, pinning there, he began to be aroused as she touched him. He forced himself to think of something outside Monica's room, which was becoming close, even warm. He focused on the red hibiscus he could see out Monica's window that faced the gardens of the Pleasure Dome. With his attention on the red flower, he felt warmth move up from the base of his spine and travel to his neck, suffusing him alternately with small chills and a delicate feverishness. He needed to get back to his apartment.

Soon the week before Easter came. Hawkins was surprised how fully this play had taken over his time, how he now focused on this above all things day and night. When the disciples gathered for the dress rehearsal, he noticed how having all the men dressed in the old way caused the whole action to take on more power.

Another change had been more subtle. Since the minister was merely filling in for the director and had no pretensions about his theatrical calling, the actors had to work matters out themselves. Gradually, Hawkins came to guide their gestures and speeches. Being Jesus had something to do with it, since he was the main player, but because Hawkins had been reading all the Bible commentaries he filled in a lot of background and at the same time lent a sense of freshness, even urgency, to how they were to play their parts, how the play was to go.

The big night came and the large sanctuary was filled. For Hawkins, by this time, all the murmuring people had become the citizens of Jerusalem just before Passover. The front of the sanctuary had been completely darkened, and when the lights came on the disciples were in their places for the scene of the Last Supper. There were soft "ooohs" and "aahs" from the audience. Then the scene settled down to the dialogue between disciples and to questions addressed to

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Jesus. Finally Hawkins rose and broke the bread for those at the table, telling them that he very much wanted to eat the bread with them, but would not eat again until the kingdom of his Father had come. The same with the goblet of wine. "Pass this among you and drink, but I will not drink until my Father's kingdom comes."

After this, Hawkins dropped the bombshell: "The hand of one of you who will betray me is on this table." The latecomer who had taken the part of Judas looked down like a scolded dog. "Woe unto the man who betrays me." After this moment, the discussion turned to who was going to be boss after Jesus left the scene, and one or two of the disciples managed to get a laugh from the audience as they fussed and preened about their relative importance in the group. The scene turned serious again when Simon Peter insisted that he was going to prison with Jesus if necessary, this after Jesus had told him Satan was after him. The little scene closed with Jesus telling Peter that three times before the cock crowed again he was going to deny even knowing him.

The second scene was still in the upstairs room and largely of Jesus going over their years together, all the hard times and the good times. How, even though they had no money or even shoes, they had stuck together and their faith had sustained them. Now the testing would begin again in earnest. He was to be tested; so were they, for all his work was left up to them and he was counting on them. As Hawkins spoke, he felt a sadness. They would betray Jesus; he had betrayed his wife; the girl with the cat had betrayed him.

The last scene of this short play was set in the garden. The disciples were all on the left side of the stage and Hawkins on the far right. The potted palms gave a good semblance of a garden as Hawkins knelt to pray with his body facing forty-five degrees to the audience. Most of the stage was dimmed, with a soft spot on Hawkins as he began speaking quietly to his Father, asking Him if he wanted to change His mind about what seemed headlong and inevitable. That maybe what would serve best would be to go back to the countryside and continue to preach.

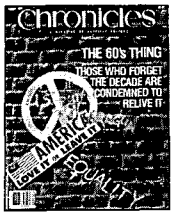
Hawkins remained quiet for a moment and then a shudder passed through him. His whole countenance changed, as the skin drew tightly across his facial bones, and the perspiration broke out on his forehead.

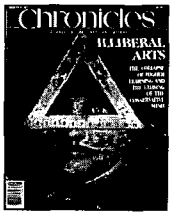
The silence in the sanctuary deepened, as if a vast abyss had appeared. The people in the audience were rapt, embraced as they were by the dark security of their vantage point and the intimate vulnerability they were privy to. Monica played the organ softly to close the scene.

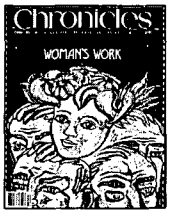
Had this drama been elsewhere the audience could have released the tension with applause. Instead they flocked around Hawkins when the play was over. His face still glistened with perspiration and he seemed exhausted. Members of the congregation said several times what a natural actor he was. He smiled a little, but seemed like he was somewhere else, even disoriented.

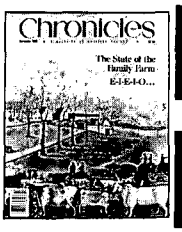
Monica came from her place at the organ. Standing off on the edge of the admirers, she frowned slightly, looking worried. When the others moved away she asked anxiously, "Are you OK?"

"Yes," coming back from where he had been. "Yes. I believe so."









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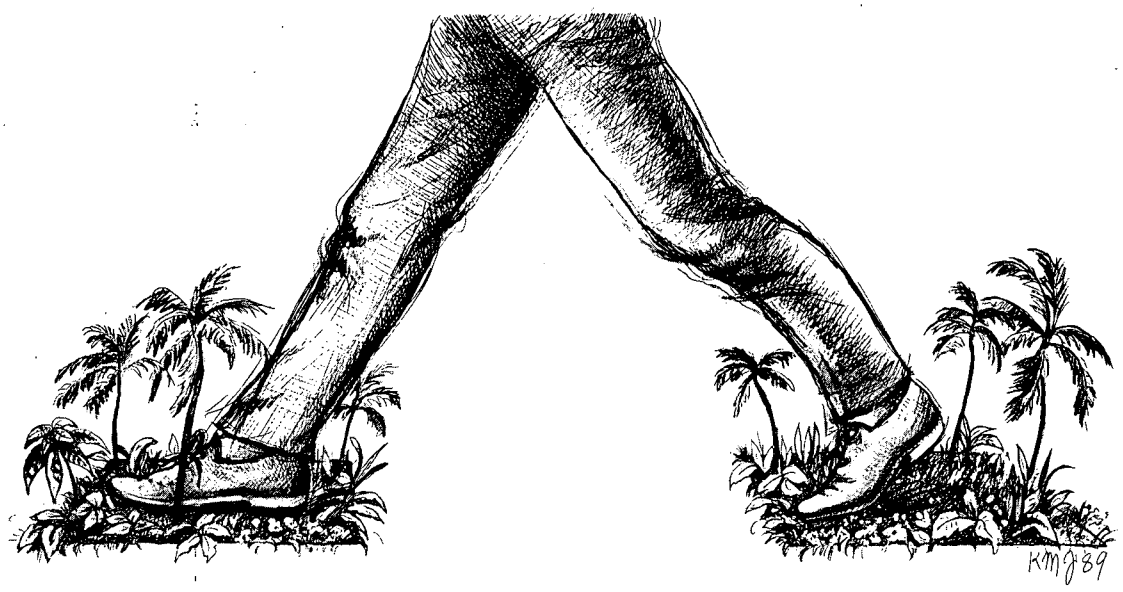
Exorcisms

by Paul Gottfried

"Truth rests with God alone, and a little bit with me."
—Yiddish Proverb



Balaam's Curse
by Moshe Leshem
New York: Simon and Schuster;
304 pp., $19.95

◆

Moshe Leshem ends *Balaam's Curse* with a warning against the growing political power of the Israeli Orthodox rabbinate. By yielding to Orthodox authorities on educational and cultural matters, he says, Israelis are sacrificing their democratic patrimony. For the sake of Israeli democracy and of the country's future relations with other nation states, Leshem urges that Israel perform a separation of church and state. This would mean that Israelis would treat religion as a private matter and, among other things, accord to the leaders of Reform and Conservative Judaism full parity with the now established Orthodox rabbinate. Only through such reforms, Leshem insists, can Israelis avert the dubious blessing—in reality a curse—that the gentile prophet Balaam pronounced upon their ancestors in the desert: "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Numbers 23:9).

Leshem's brief against the Orthodox in Israel overlooks certain cultural realities. Such massive interference with religious-cultural patterns would certainly offend most Israelis outside the intelligentsia. The (misnamed) Conservative and Reformed Jewish movements in Israel are made-in-America imports; they have little or no support even among Israeli secularists and are now being used to impose feminist social agendas on unwilling Israelis. When the *Masortim* (Conservative Jews in Israel) held services at the Western Wall conducted by women in prayer shawls, onlookers were outraged.

Despite his shrieks against organized religion, Leshem is informative on the subject of the ideological origins of the Jewish state. He correctly notes that among the Zionists who originally envisaged the creation of Israel, three different and conflicting concepts were considered. The oldest—as well as the first to be abandoned—was the idea of a Jewish state constructed by the late-19th-century Viennese journalist Theodor Herzl. As a German-speaking Central European Jew, Herzl obviously had no interest in preserving the rabbinically controlled communal life of the Eastern European Pale of Settlement. He dreamt of a Jewish state that would free his coreligionists not only from anti-Semitic Russian officials but also from the "ungentlemanly" backwardness of their own culture. The New Jew would speak German, watch clocks and mind his manners, appreciate art and take part in sports. Leshem is at his best depicting Herzl's entry into an Eastern European Jewish town, whose inhabitants rush forth to hail him as their king. Suddenly Herzl pulls out a watch—a mechanism de-

Paul Gottfried is a professor of humanities at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania.

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spised by the townsmen as a gentile invention — and lectures to his disillusioned listeners on the importance of time.

For most Eastern European Zionists, the group that founded (and, despite the present Oriental Jewish majority, still politically dominates) the state of Israel, Herzl was a "cold" and "alien" presence, the embodiment of a German-Jewish ethos unrelated to their cultural experience. More typical of later Zionists were cultural nationalists like Achad Ha-Am (Hebrew pseudonym of Asher Hirsch Ginzberg), who stressed Hebrew education and ethical religion. Though not political nationalists, such thinkers influenced the socialist pioneers who went to Israel from Eastern Europe early in the century. In time, a Zionist nationalism arose that combined the socialist agrarianism of Eastern European political radicals with Hebrew culture as a vehicle of Jewish national consciousness.

The third model, although one neglected by Jewish intellectuals, and discussed by Leshem only in passing, may have been the most important, based as it was on the vision of the Eastern European Jewish masses finally embracing the idea of a Jewish homeland. Though tensions grew between the rabbinical magisterium and the Zionist leaders who were generally contemptuous of religious orthodoxy, most Eastern European Jews, Leshem stresses, associated any specifically Jewish state with the continuation of an Eastern European Jewish community, freed of gentile persecutors. Though these masses distrusted the German Jews who sought to Westernize them, they also never fully accepted the secular, educationist Zionism of their own radicalized intellectuals.

It may be fair to say, though Leshem never carries his analysis quite far enough, that the present Israeli *Kulturkampf* represents a clash between two Eastern European concepts of Zionism. While Herzl's model never gained ground in Israel owing to the marginality of German-Jewish cultural and political ideas, it did nevertheless influence the thinking of American Jewry. If expressions of Jewish hostility toward "Christian America" have grown louder and more obsessive in recent years, this may be partly due to the disappearance in America of the old German-Jewish establishment. Like the lace-curtain-Irish, this establishment acted as a moderating force on later and more socially resentful immigrants. It stressed civility and patriotism and would have shunned the present competition among American Jews and others for the top spot on the federal government's list of socially accredited victims.

The war between Israeli secularists and the embattled Orthodox is being waged almost entirely among the descendants of Eastern European immigrants. The intervention of American Orthodox Jews, like Rabbi Meir Kahane and most of his followers, does not call this judgment into question. The same Jewish war that has broken out in Israel has long been raging in America between the two sides of a struggle that began in Eastern Europe: the rigidly Orthodox, many of whom have become militant Zionist annexationists, and the secularist, socialist Jewish intelligentsia. In America, the second group is by now more typical of the Jewish population as a whole; in Israel, by contrast, most Jews have ceased to identify actively with either militant minority, though both remain politically powerful on account of their organizational and electoral skills.

Unlike Leshem, who writes as a partisan secularist fearful that his own side may be losing, I suspect that the conflicts he describes may soon be *passé* in Israel. The majority of the country, as sociologist David Elazar notes, is made up of Sephardim, Mediterranean rather than Eastern European Jews. Though Sephardim have strong communal ties, they have never been as zealously and legalistically Orthodox as their Eastern European coreligionists. They also bear no resentment against the Christian West, looking to that civilization as a natural ally against the Arab Moslems, who expelled them and their families from the Levant and North Africa. Sephardim, moreover, have never had a romance with Marxism or socialism and despise even the watered-down collectivism preached by the Israeli Labor Party and by *Histadrut* (an umbrella union organization). Israeli Sephardim vote for the right, as Leon Hadar (a Sephardic political analyst) shows, because of their treatment as social outcasts by the Labor Party leadership and because of the vicious persecution they suffered in Arab states. Sephardim, most importantly, do not fall into either of the two warring camps that came out of Eastern Europe and are still to be found in Israel and America. That fact, at least, should bode well for the future of Israel.

Perhaps it may be necessary to call attention here to Leshem's unfortunate habit of treating religion as an expendable aspect of human life. Particularly in the last chapter, but also elsewhere, he suggests that Israel will improve its political position by becoming immaculately secularist. He is full of praise of American Jews for struggling to raise the wall of separation between church and state at home; and even regards their behavior as patriotic, since he believes America is about "pluralism" (which he equates with driving religion from public life). His views in this respect overlap those of American Jewish liberals who likewise link political conflict to religion. Like him, they believe that the first will die out only if the second can be disposed of. Liberals in general have always blamed religion for the perpetuation of social, racial, and sexist injustices, which they identify as the fundamental causes of war. Therefore, they seek to supplant religion with various humanist formulas that they believe Judaism, despite its historically patriarchal, theocentric, and nationalistic nature, must somehow convey. In an anguished statement deploring the direction of Israeli politics, Jewish liberal activist and movie star Richard Dreyfus has observed: "I was raised to believe that Jews have to be better than others, to be the ultimate moral example to the world. We cannot be silent. Being silent forty years ago meant being a good German." Going beyond the obligatory reference to a German nation of robots and to the "lesson of the Holocaust," Dreyfus here engages in the characteristically Jewish liberal practice of linking the idea of Jewish superiority to an anti-political universalism. Presumably Israel's geopolitical difficulties could be solved by bringing Israeli soldiers to a party at the swimming pool where Dreyfus holds his next interview. There they could listen to his oracular autotherapeutic assortment of dangling participles. Meanwhile, Leshem could in-

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vite the ACLU into his country, in order to insulate it against the rhetoric of crazy religious enthusiasts. One would be justified in asking how these gestures might keep Israel's sworn enemies from blowing her up. The question is, of course, an impudent one: what is to be protected is the future of an illusion of the Enlightenment, not the physical security of a nation with armed enemies just beyond its borders and a large Arab minority—much of it sympathetic to Israel's foreign enemies—within them.

A variation on the Dreyfus-Leshem view of Israel's mission as a Jewish state can be found, curiously enough, among the neoconservatives. Although they defend Israel furiously against all critics, Norman Podhoretz and his circle dream alike of a brave new world without politics. In this world, which they imagine already largely exists, nations and national interest will cease to operate; everyone will think like a neoconservative. Israelis will not have to prepare for this secularized Kingdom of God, since global democracy attaches to them irretrievably, like grace to the faithful in Calvinist theology. The truth that will never pass neoconservative lips is that Israel is not a secular pluralistic democracy. Nor is there any reason that it should be. Judaism has a time-bound relationship to the Enlightenment: one limited to its quest for a defensive strategy against Christian anti-Semitism, and to the war in Eastern and Central Europe being waged by Jewish secularists against the rabbinical magisterium.

Leshem, who may have spent too much time among ethical culturists, exaggerates the Jewish ties to Enlightened thinking. Like the authors of the Israeli Declaration of Independence, he anachronistically finds such thinking in Prophetic (as opposed to Rabbinic) Judaism, wishing us not to notice the messianic and often xenophobic nationalism, mystical utterances, and—especially in the case of Ezekiel—profound attachment to the priestly cult in the Prophets, as well as in later Judaism. Leshem even works hard to turn Herzl into a French *"philosophe manqué,"* though, as his biographers point out, Herzl took his ideas more from the gentrified German bourgeoisie than from the Age of Reason.

Unfortunately for Leshem, there is no reason to assume that all Jews at all times will (or should) accept cosmopolitan, egalitarian values; as he himself regretfully admits, these have not been integral to most Jewish experience in the past. National and religious particularities are in any case more useful in rallying a people like the Israelis in a protracted war against a determined foe. In the present circumstances, we may even wonder which side is misrepresenting the truth more: Dreyfus and Leshem, by calling for pacifist or secularist gestures in order to abolish political problems, or the global democrats, for informing us that utopia is already here. Both sides have tried to reduce politics, which properly deals with the protection of communities against their enemies, to dreams of a world without politics.

Thereby, they make it impossible to discuss national differences—even among political allies—without spiteful recrimination, since political differences are no longer tolerable among those living in either an imminent or an already established earthly paradise. Ill will and ill will alone, though variously interpreted as anti-Semitism or opposition to Jewish universalism, can cause Israeli and American interests to diverge. Indeed, it may not be ideology at all, but simply disagreement about whether utopia is already upon us, that, in America, separates certain of Israel's critics from certain others of its friends. ◈

LIBERAL ARTS

STEPPING OUT WITH UNCLE SAM, OR YOUR TAX DOLLARS HARD AT WORK

Waiters in Italian restaurants in this country get the biggest tips from customers while those in Mexican eateries fare the worst, the Internal Revenue Service has found. The average tip in Italian restaurants in 1986 was 15.8 percent, compared with 15 percent in Chinese restaurants and 14.8 percent in Mexican restaurants, according to an IRS study conducted by the University of Illinois. The IRS wisely refrained from trying to explain the differences . . .

—*from* The Chicago Tribune, *August 28, 1989*

The Treasury Department's depreciation analysis division has issued what may be the first Federal tuxedo report.

. . . The report described the tuxedo jacket as "the basic unit of input," adding: "The average rental includes the jacket, pants, cummerbund, shirt, tie and studs. Since pants usually wear out faster than jackets, approximately one and a third pairs of pants are purchased for each jacket."

. . . The statisticians found that formal-wear rental companies infrequently sell used tuxedos.

"Industry representatives noted that before used tuxedos are discarded they may be spray-painted, shredded or their sleeves may be cut off to prevent the tuxedos from being worn when their appearance would no longer suggest elegance," the report says. "There is thus little or no salvage value for retired tuxedos."

The tuxedo report is the first depreciation report issued by the depreciation analysis division. There is no mention of what the second study might be.

—*AP, August 19, 1989*

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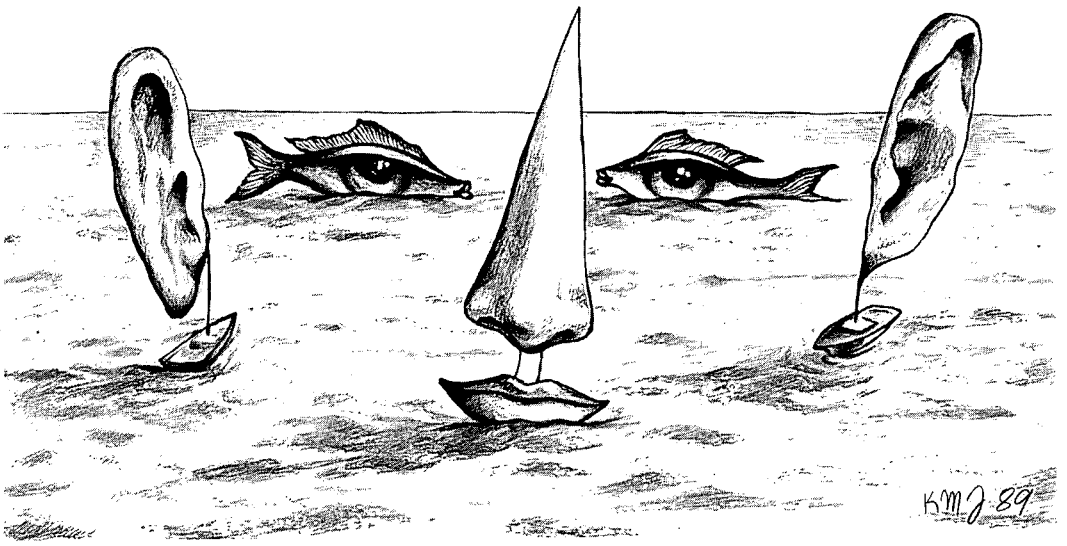
Poetry You Can Read

by R.S. Gwynn

"It seemed so simple when one was young and new ideas were mentioned not to grow red in the face and gobble."

—Logan Pearsall Smith



Expansive Poetry: Essays on the New Narrative & the New Formalism
Edited by Frederick Feirstein
Santa Cruz: Story Line Press;
262 pp., $24.95 (cloth),
$15.95 (paper)

◆

In his introduction to the 1962 Penguin anthology *Contemporary American Poetry*, Donald Hall wrote, "For thirty years an orthodoxy ruled American poetry. It derived from the authority of T.S. Eliot and the new critics; it exerted itself through the literary quarterlies and the universities. It asked for a poetry of symmetry, intellect, irony, and wit. The last few years have broken the control of this orthodoxy." Following a brief summary of current trends in which he parodied some of the extremes of the academic formalism of the 1950's, Hall offered quotes from Robert Bly and Louis Simpson as representative of the new direction of poetic style: "This imagination is irrational, yet the poem is usually quiet and the language simple; there is no straining after apocalypse. There is an inwardness to these images, a profound subjectivity." In other words, the poetry arising to challenge the status quo would employ open forms in lieu of the symmetry of traditional meters and rhyme, the voice of the unconscious as opposed to that of the rational mind, and a tone of sincerity and commitment instead of wit and irony. The new poem, if we are to judge from Hall's own selections, would likely be a short, free-verse lyric in which the poet would try to communicate the "intricate darkness of feeling and instinct" that makes up "general subjective life." In these remarks, Hall proved remarkably prescient.

While Hall expressed optimism that the new poetry would not "substitute one orthodoxy for another," hoping that "all possibilities, even contradictory ones, [might] exist together," the essays in Frederick Feirstein's *Expansive Poetry* indicate that the new order proved as inflexible as the old. Feirstein and Frederick Turner, in their introduction, speak of "how narrow and doctrinaire . . . the world of poetry in the seventies" had become. Paul Lake describes the era as one "when to write in a tradition that extends beyond the formal and prosodic possibilities of the verse of William Carlos Williams and his epigones was to court silence or critical disdain." Dana Gioia experiences "a deep disappointment over the predictable sameness, the conspicuous lack of diversity" in a typical year's publications. Robert McDowell notes that the successive movements of postmodernism—"Academic, Beat, Confessional, Projective, Deep Image, Surrealism"—stressed "the importance of the poet's interior landscape rather than the poet's place in the larger community." While these generalizations cannot be empirically proven, they are borne out by a perusal of the contents of most American poetry magazines, where free verse and autobiographical subject matter far outweigh closed forms and such genres as the dramatic monologue and narrative. If the subjectivism of the deep image school and the surrealism of the

R.S. Gwynn is the editor of the Dictionary of Literary Biography *volume* Contemporary American Poets. *He is a professor of English at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas.*

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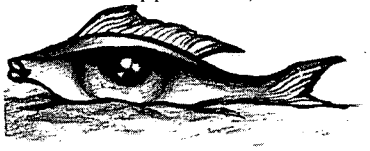
70's have waned to a degree, the reader still will not have to look far to find such leaps of association as this one by Jack Driscoll, from a recent issue of *Poetry*: "I stared and stared / at the shape of my mother's lips, the square of Kleenex almost dissolved, a perfect red O / floating in the toilet. / I don't know why I thought of you, Houdini, / naked beneath the frozen Detroit river."

If one is a believer in neat Hegelian progressions, "the New Narrative & the New Formalism" that are the subjects of this collection would indeed seem inevitable, representing a synthesis that repudiates certain aspects of the past and consolidates others. Both of the movements that make up Expansivist Poetry favor retention of a relaxed, conversational idiom and a subject matter, according to Robert McPhillips, derived "not from the academy but from the quotidian world and the desire to write about emotion directly and memorably." The poet should reject the excesses of confessionalism in favor of a more objective stance; as McDowell notes in outlining ten qualities of a New Narrative, "In a good narrative poem the narrator is a witness." A more traditional approach to prosody is advocated by a number of the participants. Wyatt Prunty, decrying what he calls the "stylish, highly marketable thinness" of the poetry of Robert Creeley and A.R. Ammons, what he wittily terms "Emaciated Poetry," argues for "rhythm regular enough to function as rhythm, lines long enough to allow that rhythm to work." All of these, if not quite automatically yielding what the book's jacket loudly promises ("THIS BOOK IS ABOUT POETRY YOU CAN READ!"), at least offer alternatives to an American poetry whose bankruptcy is undeniably demonstrated by its lack of readers beyond the poets themselves, and by its general retreat into the closed world of the university writing programs and presses subsidized by public funds.

As much as one might welcome the levelheadedness that characterizes the writing in *Expansive Poetry*, some problems surface almost immediately. The writers' tone is often too shrill and self-congratulatory in alluding to "struggle" and the "irritated and isolated" persistence of the poets they advocate. The wilderness in which they have cried has not been without its compensations: Feirstein lists several impressive awards and a Guggenheim in his biographical notes; Dick Allen has received grants from the NEA and the Ingram-Merrill Foundation; Timothy Steele's *Sapphics Against Anger and Other Poems* was published by Random House. Further, the circle of writers discussed here may be too small to validate the editor's claims that the poetry has had time "to prevail and establish itself," especially since many of the essays refer to poetry written by the book's own contributors. These blemishes notwithstanding, they are more than balanced by the often hysterical responses quoted from poets of the other camp. Diane Wakoski somehow manages to equate T.S. Eliot's poetics with Ronald Reagan's politics; another critic labels the movement "Yuppie Poetry"; Bin Ramke, poetry editor for the University of Georgia Press, asks whether "the return . . . to received forms" has occurred because "the elite wants its badge shined." One notes in all three comments a simplistic, even simpleminded, attempt to politicize the aims of the movement. Addressing this point, Paul Lake entitles his essay "Toward a Liberal Poetics," arguing that politicization is "simply a rather shabby rhetorical device employed to frighten the sheep back into the fold." Unfortunately, some of the other contributors employ the same strategies. At the end of their fascinating essay on the neurological basis of poetic meter, "The Neural Lyre," Frederick Turner and Ernst Pöppel make the farfetched contention that "free verse, like existentialist philosophy, is nicely adapted to the needs of the bureaucratic and even the totalitarian state, because of its confinement of human concern within narrow specialized limits where it will not be politically threatening." The legions of Hitler and Stalin did not march to the different drummer of projective verse.

A larger defect than any of these, however, arises from the need to gather several different poetic camps under the expansivist banner, an attempt that leads to confused aims in many essays. While many of the contributors explore the possibilities of the long poem, no one ever manages to define how long *long* is, as if Poe's preposterous hundred-line limit had settled the question for all time. Either through oversight or willful omission scant attention is paid to such extended efforts as James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*, Vikram Seth's verse novel *The Golden Gate*, or Alfred Corn's *Notes from a Child of Paradise*. Similarly, no one succeeds in explaining how the New Narrative differs from the old; Richard Moore skillfully examines the delights of narrative poetry, but his chief exemplars are Hardy and Frost. McDowell's ten points of definition, which grew out of his and Mark Jarman's editorial criteria for *The Reaper*, contain little that cannot be deduced from the *Poetics*. In one of the collection's clearest pieces of analysis, Robert McPhillips contrasts the plain styles of the New Formalists with the baroque utterances of the 50's academics, but, in citing examples from the early works of John Hollander, Anthony Hecht, and Richard Wilbur, he ignores the more relaxed idioms employed by all three poets since roughly the mid-1960's. While "expansive" may be as good a label as any for the general directions probed in these essays, no clear relationship is established between a poet's technique (whether to write in meter or free verse, for example) and his way of dealing with subject matter (the ancient distinctions of lyrical, dramatic, and narrative approaches).



Nevertheless, *Expansive Poetry* should prove heartening to readers who have found little to cheer them in the last few decades of American poetry, provocative only to those who have some stake in maintaining the hegemonies of such intertwined entities as the Associated Writing Programs, the *American Poetry Review*, and national and state arts councils. The common sense and lucid style common to most of the essays in this collection are good recommendations for the works they examine, and, in seeking them out, one hopes to encounter the honorable aims of pleasure and instruction that too much contemporary poetry seems to have abandoned.

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Feminism Fatigued

by William Murchison

Weak Link: The Feminization of the American Military
by Brian Mitchell
Chicago & Washington: Regnery Gateway; 232 pp., $17.95

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The feminist century — ours — is markedly different from any period known . . . I was going to say "to man" but perhaps we don't talk that way anymore. Events have transformed the relationship of the sexes from one in which men occupied most leadership roles to one in which women make laws, minister the sacraments, and direct corporate takeovers. Over the past twenty years, landmarks have been swallowed up. The terrain is dreamlike: familiar in its own way, and yet shrouded in mist. So quickly have the changes come, so broadly and deeply have they penetrated society, that we cannot completely comprehend what has been happening. It still startles, for instance, to happen on a book jacket bearing a title like *Weak Link: The Feminization of the American Military*. We all know that for the past couple of decades there have been women in all branches of the military service, but we did not know — perhaps had not even thought to wonder — whether the basic meaning of military service had changed.

We know in our hips, to borrow from Willmoore Kendall, that war is about death and suffering and heroism and that none of this will be different short of the Second Coming. Thus we assume that the military, in assimilating women into its ranks, requires that they live up to the masculine requirements of strength and bravery. The thesis of Brian Mitchell's valorous book — I'll be surprised if he isn't lynched on account of it — is that the military has failed to keep in mind these realities: that it has downgraded performance standards in the name of equal job opportunity; that it is building a kinder, gentler military that may or may not pass the next test it faces.

As recently as 1986, Ronald Reagan's secretary of the Army, John O. Marsh, Jr., asserted that modern military values mirror "the ethic of our people which denies any assertive national power doctrine and projects a love and mercy to all." Love! Mercy! A fine theological duo, certainly, but the Army is not a seminary. The human consensus, from Homer to Patton, is that the army's job is unlovingly to stomp the bejesus out of the enemy.

Soldiering-as-a-man's-job is one of those antique prejudices we are instructed to shed in the last decade of the feminist century: the military bureaucracy seems to have shed it almost completely. If you wonder how soldiers can assert unsoldierly things, remember who appropriates the money the military spends. Congress. Congress is dominated by political, ah, leaders dependent on the support of the feminist lobby. The military knows on what side its bread is buttered. "Personnel," writes Mitchell, who is a reporter for the *Navy Times* and a former infantry officer, "are required to attend equal opportunity training during which EO officers preach the sanctity of sexual equality and the folly and immorality of belief in traditional sex roles. The definition of sexual harassment has expanded to include the open expression of opposition to women in the military. Officers and senior enlisteds are kept in check by their performance reports; a 'ding' in the block that reads 'Support Equal Opportunity' can have career-ending consequences."

The military still resists the introduction of women into combat but has so narrowed the definition of "combat" that many female soldiers would be caught up in the shooting should war actually come. Meanwhile, the sisterhood continues to campaign in behalf of the right of sisters to go into combat, from which the patriarchy has so far excluded them. The question of male-female roles is one that society, out of embarrassment, hesitates to wrestle with. To raise it at all is to acknowledge archaic patterns of thought. Feminist successes in sweeping aside employment barriers have conditioned us to believe that, for professional purposes anyway, men and women are interchangeable units. If a man can string telephone wires or sew sutures, so can a woman.

The Pope finds that fewer and fewer Roman Catholics listen patiently to explanations of why all priests are male. (In the American Communion they no longer are.) "Come on," say advanced spirits, "what do you mean a woman can't say words over some bread and some wine, same as a man can say them?" The priesthood has become another affirmative action frontier, along whose borders impatient caravans are camped, awaiting only the signal to enter. The military is not unlike the priesthood in that it is a sexual vocation — of secular, not theological, character. Men are soldiers for self-evident reasons, such as aggressiveness and upper-body strength (simply to leap from a foxhole, carrying a rifle, takes muscle).

History shows forth a few — a very few — female military leaders, like Boadicea and Zenobia, but no feminized armies at all. The Amazons never existed, and the Israelis, contrary to a familiar fabrication, employ military women largely as clerks, typists, nurses, and so on. Never do Israeli women go into combat.

On what grounds, then, do we challenge the concept of the man as warrior, the woman as tender of the home fires? Ideological grounds, of course: what women want, and these days it is a lot they want. Actually, as Mitchell shows, feminists have divided motives in seeking to integrate the military. Some want to show they're as tough and hard-bitten as any man (though few if any have achieved this). Others want to sensitize the warmaking profession, to make it more tender, more egalitarian, more pacifistic, of all things. The Army's male adjutant general recently expressed the pious hope that among American warriors there would grow "sensitivity toward and more caring for one another."

The net result is the same . . . the sanding down of rough male edges, the softening of tone and substance. Veter-

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ans historically like to sentimentalize the Old Army, or the Old Navy, where things were rougher and tougher than today. Well, this time they're right. Standards have been scaled down sharply to accommodate those otherwise unable to meet them.

Women have, to begin with, only 80 percent of men's overall strength. During 1980 tests at West Point the work of male cadets exceeded that of female ones by 48 percent at the leg press and 473 percent at the bench press. "All of the services," Mitchell writes, "have double standards for men and women on all the events of their regular physical fitness tests . . . In the Army, the youngest women are given an extra three minutes to complete a two-mile run." Additionally, women are hospitalized three times as often as men. They are unavailable for duty from two to two-and-a-half times as often as men. They leave the military at a higher rate than men, and up to 17 percent are pregnant in any given year. Eleven percent, being single parents, must worry about child care. What we have on this sad showing is a military establishment significantly less prepared to defend the country than an all-male military of comparable size.

Just here the eyes and the mind start to roll in concert. It is like standing in front of a funhouse mirror. Everything is wavy. The question before us is life and freedom, not employment opportunity, yet opportunity is the only consideration that seems to matter when the topic is military women. Feminism-in-fatigues is the last laugh of that egalitarianism spawned by the French Revolution two hundred years ago. At this point—the point at which we assert that a female soldier is the same as a male soldier—all is reduced to absurdity.

The complementarity and mutuality of the sexes is not what we talk about anymore . . . the role of this one, the role of that one. We talk about interchangeableness, even when we know (or should know) interchangeableness to be a lie. History instructs us as to the martial nature of the male; but it teaches an even harder lesson, which is that social arrangements built on lies are not long for this world. Things are as they are; they are not necessarily as the silver-tongued and nimble-brained would like them.

Feminists now seeking to repeal the law barring women from combat are in reality trying to repeal the laws of nature. These, unlike acts of Congress, are unrepealable, but nonetheless various women won't be happy until fellow women can get blown apart by artillery shells, just like men. How's that for love, compassion, equality, and the rest of that good 20th-century stuff?

William Murchison is an editorial page editor at the Dallas Morning News.

One, Two, Many Colombias

by Wayne Lutton

Warlords of Crime: Chinese Secret Societies—The New Mafia
by Gerald L. Posner
New York: McGraw-Hill;
289 pp., $18.95

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Great Britain's decision to transfer control of Hong Kong to Communist China by 1997 has spurred a flight from the colony. Despite reassurances from Beijing, money is flowing out of Hong Kong at an accelerating rate. Among those who are moving their assets are the Chinese crime syndicates—the Triads.

While they are expanding their criminal empires in Western Europe and Canada, the Triads' destination of preference is the United States. Their presence is growing and has prompted California Attorney General John Van de Kamp to warn that, "There hasn't been a mass exodus of criminals on this scale since 1980, when Fidel Castro opened up his prisons and flushed the worst elements of Cuban society—the *Marielitos*—into Florida." He fears that the stage is being set for a "catastrophe, unless we send word across the Pacific that this is a dangerous and inhospitable place for gangs to do business." That Van de Kamp's remarks are not exaggerated is supported by the findings of New York City-based investigator Gerald Posner, author of the first book-length account of the Chinese Triads. In *Warlords of Crime*, Posner traces the history of the Triads and reveals how their influence is spreading across the country.

The Triads date back to the 17th century, when patriotic Han Chinese founded secret societies to fight the foreign Manchu invaders and restore the Ming dynasty. By the end of the 19th century, many Triads had largely abandoned their political idealism and had transformed themselves into highly organized criminal enterprises. Leading politicians, including Dr. Sun Yat-sen, found it expedient to trade favors with the powerful Triads, who gained greater opportunities for profits after the Manchu were finally overthrown in 1911.

Triads have been active in Hong Kong since 1842. During World War II, they tended to cooperate with the Japanese, to control the dockyards, and were able to penetrate the labor markets. Additional Triads fled to Hong Kong, Macao (the nearby Portugese colony that comes under Beijing authority in 1999), and Taiwan, after Mao seized power on the mainland in 1949.

Posner reports that today, Hong Kong is the headquarters for at least fifty secret Triads, who have a combined membership of some 300,000 people. One society, the 14 K Triad, has nearly 30,000 members. Posner notes that many Triad members are of Chiu Chau descent, from the Swatow region of southern China. They play a role in Asian crime similar to that of the Sicilians in the Italian Mafia.

Triads are involved in gambling, prostitution, extortion, loansharking, protection rackets, murder-for-hire, and political corruption. However, their most important source of wealth derives from their control of the world's major supplies of heroin. Posner escorts his readers on a tour of the "Golden Triangle," the hilly area bordering Burma, Laos, and Thailand, where over 70 percent of the world's opium is grown. As the author points out, this virtual monopoly "gives them an advantage that other criminal syndicates do not have. . . . Without heroin they are just another group of criminals. With heroin they have a potential for profit unmatched in the annals of organized crime."

Posner explains how the opium is refined into heroin and discloses the methods used to smuggle tons of that

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substance around the globe. Hong Kong and Rotterdam currently are the keys in their distribution network, since these two ports have the heaviest volume of traffic, making it nearly impossible—especially in the present political and economic environment—to monitor cargoes passing through them. Heroin is repackaged and shipped out of Hong Kong and Rotterdam to the drug markets in Europe and North America.

"Crack" and the Cocaine Cowboys have captured the headlines in America in recent months, a development that has tended to obscure the impact of the problems created by our heroin addicts. Yet, as Posner reminds us, there are an estimated 750,000 heroin addicts in the US, up from 500,000 addicts when President Nixon declared his own "war on drugs" back in 1971. These heroin users are responsible for nearly three-quarters of urban crime. Despite millions of dollars spent on anti-heroin efforts, only AIDS has had any real effect in retarding the growth in the number of junkies.

As the author admits, it was the changes in US immigration laws made in 1965 that opened the door to Chinese criminals: since that year, Chinese and other Asian immigrants have flooded into our country. The FBI reports that Asian youth gangs are employed as "street muscle" by the Triads, who in the US operate through Tongs (the word, which is derived from "Town Hall," describes fronts that often publicly engage in charitable work in Chinese communities). These Asian syndicates pose special problems for law enforcement, since their members are bound to secrecy, and the almost insurmountable barriers of language, dialect, and culture make prosecution difficult in the extreme.

In short, as Posner's remarkable book makes evident, the US currently has almost no capability to deal with the Triads. And as we approach 1997, this failure of law enforcement becomes even more critical. Posner is to be commended for preparing his chilling exposé. But will the United States meet this new challenge? Given how we have reacted to the Cuban, Colombian, Mexican, Haitian, Jamaican, Nigerian, Vietnamese, and other criminal gangs that have come into the country in recent years, I, for one, am not betting that we will.

Wayne Lutton is a policy analyst writing from Washington, DC.

In Search of the New American Man

by Michael Lind

Taming the Prince: The Ambivalence of Modern Executive Power
by Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.
New York: The Free Press; 358 pp., $24.95

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The evident purpose of *Taming the Prince* is to provide a respectable philosophical pedigree for the usurpations and abuses of power by American Presidents since FDR. (Professor Mansfield dedicates the book to his father, "constant advocate of a strong presidency from Franklin Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan.") Where conservatives such as Corwin, Kendall, Burnham, and Samuel Francis have seen danger in the growth of extra-constitutional presidential power, Mansfield finds "ambivalence." We need "some general understanding favoring strong executive power to resist legislative usurpation and its partner, overbearing bureaucracy." Mansfield seeks to provide that understanding by illogically obscuring the distinction between execution of the laws and tyranny: "since some taint of tyranny necessarily accompanies law, law can only be executed tyrannically."

Having conflated law enforcement and lawlessness, Mansfield claims that political philosophy provides two ways to "tame and use" the necessary tyranny of executive power. The first method of reducing "the necessary risk of tyranny" inseparable from executive power is Aristotle's. In the ideal regime, the executive would be transformed from "the destroyer of law unto a king, the guardian of law." In practice, it is only possible to achieve the second-best option—the rule of law, achieved by the dispersal of executive power among a number of magistrates in a mixed regime.

Mansfield is disappointed that Aristotle fails to anticipate his perception that executive power is necessarily beyond the law. "Again we watch Aristotle passing up an opportunity to develop executive power" by failing to postulate "a fund of arbitrariness with which to govern willful men" and by his failure to "construct a guise of legality" for such arbitrary one-man rule. Even worse, in Aristotle's *Politics*, the executive offices "are discussed in the plural without reference to the need for unity in one man that modern theories of the executive assert." Mansfield forgets that the Swiss executive is the seven-member Federal Council, and the British executive the Cabinet, not the prime minister. Aristotle (like the US Supreme Court, which has consistently upheld the constitutionality of independent agencies) mistakenly believes that a plurality of independent executive magistrates is necessary to maintain the supremacy of the legislative assembly; whereas Mansfield claims, in language that would have warmed the heart of Louis Napoleon, Hitler, or Perón, that "the people should be embodied in one man . . . to secure the unity of executive powers, despite their separate definitions, through the unity of one human body."

Mansfield, unable to find his "am-

BRIEF MENTIONS

THE WRITING LIFE by Annie Dillard
New York: Harper & Row; 111 pp., $15.95
The author of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and *An American Childhood* has written a book that is in many ways more autobiographical than her autobiography, because writing (and reading) has always been the substance of Annie Dillard's life. Young people looking for advice will find it, as long as they are not looking for someone to tell them what kind of pen to use, or which writing program to enter: pick a subject you love, she says, and then worry that bone till you have cleaned it of every bit of marrow. The stylist of *Pilgrim* makes her welcome return here. (KD)

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bivalent" or innately extralegal executive in Aristotle (or in medieval thinkers such as Aquinas, Dante, or Marsilius of Padua), claims that "a second remedy was first proposed by Machiavelli . . . This is to recognize openly the necessity of tyranny in the character of the prince, who initiates and innovates, even while he seeks democratic sanction for his actions so that he may seem merely to execute the people's will." This "modern doctrine of executive power" is, however, alien to the author of *The Prince* and *The Discourses*. Where the real man was concerned with achieving political stability in a world subjected to unstable fortune, Mansfield's Machiavelli is primarily exercised by "the problem for which the modern notion of executive power is the solution"—namely, the difficulty of reasoning from generals to particulars in the application of law (a problem that bothered Kant and Condorcet far more than Machiavelli).

When Mansfield discusses Machiavelli's views on dictatorship, his Machiavelli loses all resemblance to the historical one. "Machiavelli denies that dictatorial authority was harmful or that it was the cause that brought tyranny to Rome, as had been alleged." By paraphrase and selective quotation, Mansfield makes it sound as though Machiavelli approves of dictatorship in general. In fact, in a passage that Mansfield curiously does not quote, Machiavelli argues that the specific Roman institution of dictatorship did not harm the Roman republic *only* because of the virtue of the Roman people, the "short duration of the dictatorship," and—most important—because the Roman dictator's "limited authority" permitted him to "do nothing to diminish the constitutional position of the government, as would have been the case if he could have taken away the authority vested in the senate or in the people, or have abolished the ancient institutions of the city and made new ones." In other words, Machiavelli is making the very distinction Mansfield claims he does not make—between the temporary dictator, governed by law even in crisis, and the founder or reformer of a city, a genuinely despotic "prince" who creates or purges "modes and orders."

Machiavelli goes on to argue that in emergencies government by a council, not by a single man, is best. He also warns against giving either a single or a collective temporary dictator "power to make laws and in general to act as if they were the . . . people." Long-term authority should not be given to any individual, even an elected executive, unless accompanied by "supervisors . . . appointed to see to it that they should not be able to abuse their authority." So far from arguing that the executive is inherently or necessarily beyond the law, Machiavelli praises Roman dictators who "could not annul a decree of the senate, nor . . . make new laws," and claims that "[n]o republic is ever perfect unless by its laws it has provided for all contingencies, and for every eventuality has provided a remedy and determined the method of applying it."

Another of Mansfield's claims, that Machiavelli "abandons all concern, vital in the Aristotelian tradition, for the distinction between the tyrant and the king who rules justly," is equally groundless. In a chapter of *The Discourses* entitled "Those who set up a Tyranny are no less Blameworthy than are the Founders of a Republic or a Kingdom Praiseworthy," Machiavelli argues that law-abiding kings and republican magistrates in life "rest secure and in death become renowned," whereas tyrants in life "are in continual straits, and in death leave behind them an imperishable record of their infamy." How can Mansfield, then, write that "Machiavelli thought his new doctrine would bring men more glory and security no matter what regime"? Because Mansfield's doctrine of executive power, which he claims was passed on, with modifications, from Machiavelli to the American Founders by way of Hobbes, Locke, and Montesquieu, is not to be found in Machiavelli at all, the subsequent argument of the book collapses.

Mansfield ends *Taming the Prince* with a paean to the prince (his, not Machiavelli's) untamed. "Periods of executive leadership such as the Reagan Revolution show what American government means," writes Mansfield. "The Reagan Revolution . . . promised to produce a certain America, peopled by a certain kind of American with certain virtues—not just the same America better off or more secure." This comes as news to many of us who voted for Ronald Reagan, unaware that we were granting an "ambivalent," that is, inherently lawless executive the authority to mold us into the American equivalent of the Soviet New Man. Aristotle, with his preference for divided power and the rule of law, "would not have approved the modern executive in whom one-man rule becomes actual and the rule of law comes to seem theoretical," and Machiavelli, champion of senatorial oversight, would have been horrified by the lawlessness of Admiral Poindexter or Colonel North. But we should not worry, according to Mansfield, as long as the California actor or Texas oil man who happens to occupy the Oval Office has "the perfection of the soul" that is virtue. And besides, we do not need to worry about executive tyranny, since "while previous republics were fearful of great men, Americans are proud of their 'great presidents.'"

Praise God we Americans can all sleep tight in our beds for evermore.

Michael Lind writes from Washington, DC.

The Unsovereign Artist

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

William Faulkner: American Writer
by Frederick R. Karl
New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson; 1,131 pp., $37.50

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A thousand-page book, like a thousand-foot ship, must not disappoint; unfortunately, Karl Frederick's *William Faulkner* is the *QE II* of American literary biography. "This book attempts," Professor Karl states in his foreword, "to integrate the latest in biographical information with Faulkner's own large body of work in fiction and poetry." He adds that, "It will not replace Joseph Blotner's monumental two-volume biography of Faulkner, which is an altogether different kind of book," but does not deign to mention the more recently published *William Faulkner: The Man and the Artist* (Harper & Row, 1987)

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by Stephen B. Oates—an (atrocious) exercise in what its author described as "pure biography," making use of "psychological insights" in order "to shape the whole of Faulkner's life so as to suggest its essence." Especially by comparison with Oates's vulgarly pretentious aim, Professor Karl's agenda may strike the sympathetic reader as a refreshingly straightforward alternative to Professor Blotner's old-fashioned (impure?) biographical approach. In this frame of mind, it is possible to pass uncritically over Professor Karl's subsequent words, when he says, "This study is in the deepest [!] sense a biography: not only a presentation of the relevant facts of the subject's life, but an effort to understand and interpret that life psychologically, emotionally, and literally." The word "biography," apparently, has been purifying and deepening itself lately, to the point where—like the word "democracy"—it has become susceptible of personal definition. (Or perhaps it is simpler than that. "Well, how long was the *Mauretania*?" "790 feet." "The *Acquitania*?" "901 feet." "Well, let's make this one a thousand feet and see what happens." This from *The Queen Mary* by Neil Potter and Jack Frost.)

It is possible, I think, without signing away one's life to the New Criticism, to agree with M.E. Bradford that a profound mystery exists between the life of the artist and the life of his art, the integrity of which needs to be respected for reasons going even beyond its inscrutability. That, on the theoretical level, is my primary complaint against *William Faulkner: American Writer*; on the practical level, there is the further problem that Professor Karl's method of demonstrating the biographical wellsprings of literature requires that he recapitulate the story line, and reintroduce the principal characters, of even the most minor of Faulkner's works. To a reader no more than moderately familiar with the Faulkner corpus, the procedure is tedious in the extreme, and grows more so as the stack of turned pages mounts steadily beneath his passive left hand. William Faulkner himself explained his failure to read *Gone With the Wind* by insisting that no story requires a thousand pages for its telling; and though in refutation of his argument we have *War and Peace*, the simple fact is that Tolstoy—unlike Karl, who is a careless, imprecise, and often confusing writer—for the most part wrote good sentences. Even if we grant that the ship should be as long as it must be, the stipulation that the plates be cleanly riveted and that the lines draw the eye still obtains.

There are other problems with *William Faulkner: American Writer*, almost all of them subsumable under what has to be seen as the overarching one, which is Professor Karl's completely uncritical enthusiasm for that artistic movement known as Modernism, itself the subject of an earlier and most interesting work (*Modern and Modernism: The Sovereignty of the Artist 1885-1925*, 1985) by the same author. While it is beyond question that the innovative, fundamentally subjective techniques of literary Modernism have produced what are—particularly by comparison with so much of the literary production of Postmodernism—masterpieces, it is certainly going too far to see in Modernism the scientifically certified apex of several millennia of literary evolution. Evelyn Waugh, for example, who set out quite deliberately in the opposite, "retrograde" direction, had artistically sound reasons for doing so, as George McCartney has demonstrated. Given his aesthetic formulation, Waugh was by no means philistine in regarding James Joyce—the Joyce who wrote *Ulysses* anyway—as "barmy"; nor is *The Sound and the Fury* at any level a novel superior to Waugh's masterpiece, *A Handful of Dust*. As a book should be as long as it needs to be, so should it be written in the style its subject, material, and author require, the Modernist being simply one among many possible lying to hand. Professor Karl, however, does not see it this way: for him, Modernism is the shining way, not capable of supercession until something still more innovative comes along. Thus he insists on regarding Faulkner as probably the greatest American novelist of the 20th century (as probably he was) because he adapted the techniques of European Modernism both to his native soil and his native talent. When, after *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Faulkner by and large ceased to employ those innovations—and certainly to extend them—he entered upon what Karl can only see as a long period of gradual creative decline. That the later novels may in fact represent a falling-off of Faulkner's talent is not the point; what is crucial is that Karl sees progressive innovation as a touchstone of great art, without seeming to consider that innovation may be unsuited to various literary subjects and materials, and to the voices that these generate. When after *Absalom!* Faulkner became, roughly speaking, a vadic poet of sorts, the voices and techniques that had been suitable to *The Sound and the Fury* became simply inapplicable to the work at hand. Whether or not the innovator in Faulkner was aware of that fact, the artist surely was.

The question of William Faulkner's religious belief—or the want thereof—is a vexed one. Professor Karl is at pains to stress the "spiritual" aspect of Faulkner's writing—Old Ben, The Wilderness, the paramount virtue of endurance—while at the same time downplaying his avoidance of doctrine, church, and formalized belief. Karl's emphasis is consonant with his idea of "the sovereignty of the artist," who becomes thereby a kind of priest, withholding to himself and kindred sophisticates the artistic vision that so often functions as the Modernist equivalent of the religious one. Here, however, Karl misreads his subject. Addressing a class at the University of Virginia in 1957, Faulkner remarked, "Why the Christian religion has never harmed me. I hope I have never harmed it. I have the sort of provincial Christian background which one takes for granted without thinking too much about it, probably. That I'm probably—within my own rights I'm a good Christian—whether it would please anybody else's standard or not I don't know." Con-

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cerning his own standard, William Faulkner himself was clearly in some doubt; yet two facts are incontrovertible. The first is—Karl refers to it—that along with Shakespeare, the Old Testament was Faulkner's favorite reading matter, and that, as his fiction attests, he was well versed in it. The second is that Faulkner realized, ultimately, that art and the artist are *not* sovereign. What other, final, explanation is possible for his lifelong inclination to play every *other* role than that of the writer? This "imposter," as Professor Karl calls him, may have been such; but his impostures appear to have been prompted by genuine humility and self-knowledge, rather than their opposites. Faulkner, the consummate artist, knew just how unsovereign artists actually are. Like other major writers—one thinks of Hemingway, the big game hunter—he felt, at times, that an artist was among the most insignificant, if not actually contemptible, things to be. Like Tolstoy, he preferred very often to think of himself as a farmer instead.

In one respect—and one only—is the artist vassal, not suzerain, for Professor Karl; and that is in his relationship to progressive opinion. Throughout his text, Karl is at pains to Americanize Faulkner—which is to say, to transmogrify him from a white Mississippian of his time into an eccentric kindred spirit (but a kindred spirit all the same) of the (white) Northeastern liberal of *Karl's* contemporary milieu; when the portrait-frame, subjected to such unnatural pressures, begins to bend and warp (as it does whenever Faulkner's problematic attitudes toward the question of race arise), Karl simply apologizes for the discrepancy, and cites the fact that, after all, Faulkner *was* a white Mississippian, etc., etc. . . . How sad that a man who has spent years researching and writing a thousand-plus-page book about another man, of another place and time, should seem to consider his labors justified only to the extent that his subject's ideas concerning race, religion, women, and what we today call global democracy dovetail with the prevailing orthodoxy. Because, otherwise, why worry such old bones?

Chilton Williamson, Jr. is book editor of Chronicles.

Tugging the Leash

by J.O. Tate

Poodle Springs
by Raymond Chandler and Robert E. Parker
New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons; 268 pp., $18.95

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Marlowe's back, and Parker's got him. Well he should. Parker knows every one of Chandler's quirks: he wrote part of his dissertation about Chandler twenty years ago. And then he started writing his Spenser books. (Where do you suppose he got the idea to name his private eye after a 16th-century English poet?) But Spenser is very East Coast—unlike Marlowe, the disillusioned voice of La-La Land.

There's no point in belaboring the "plot" or the action of *Poodle Springs*—there wasn't much point to that in Chandler's books, either, because readers followed Marlowe for the uneasy atmosphere and the snappy patter, not for the rhinestone ratiocination or even for what was going to happen next. Readers hung not on what Marlowe said but on how he said it; they turned the pages of the books because Raymond Chandler compelled them with what he called "magic" and "music."

Parker undoubtedly has some of that wise-cracking Marlovian magic. His ventriloquism is accomplished—he makes you want to turn the page for some more of this sort of stuff:

> "Do detectives have fights, Mr. Marlowe?" she said.
>
> "Sometimes," I said. "Usually we put the criminal in his place with a well-polished phrase."
>
> "Are you carrying a gun?"
>
> I shook my head. "I didn't know you'd be here," I said.

Sometimes, though, Parker misfires: "I was so far out on the limb now . . . that I felt like a coconut." That one doesn't fly because coconuts don't grow far out on limbs. On the whole, though, Parker maintains that certain Chandlerian strain:

> For a change of pace I swiveled my chair around and stared out the window at Hollywood Boulevard for a while. The first idea I had was that it was time to change the grease in the fryolator in the coffee shop downstairs.

Now that one was bottled in bond.

So never mind about the case Marlowe works on. The point is, he's married. Raymond Chandler himself wrote the first four chapters right before he died in 1959. Those four chapters are familiar to Chandlerians from *Raymond Chandler Speaking* (1962), and are here imaginatively continued by Parker, who's done his homework. He remembers that Marlowe met Linda Loring in *The Long Goodbye* (1954) while they were both drinking gimlets, so we have an authentic reprise of that potent cocktail. We have pornography, as in *The Big Sleep*, an allusion to the gambling ships of *Farewell, My Lovely*, a key photograph as in *The High Window*, a Santa Ana as in "Red Wind," a nostalgic reflection as in *The Little Sister*. This was Chandlertown in 1949:

> I used to like this town. . . . A long time ago. There were trees along Wilshire Boulevard. Beverly Hills was a country town. Westwood was bare hills and lots offering at eleven hundred dollars and no takers. Hollywood was a bunch of frame houses on the interurban line. Los Angeles was just a big dry sunny place with ugly homes and no style, but goodhearted and peaceful. It had the climate they just yap about now. People used to sleep out on porches. Little groups who thought they were intellectual used to call it the Athens of America. It wasn't that, but it wasn't a neon-lighted slum either.

Parker's paraphrase, in 1989, goes like this:

> It was one of those comfortable cool bungalows with big front porches that they used to build at about the time that L.A. was a sprawling comfortable place with a lot of sunshine and no smog. People used to sit on those porches in the evening and sip iced tea and watch the

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neighbors water their lawns with
long loping sweeps of a hose.
They used to sleep with the
front door open and the screen
door held with a simple hook.
They used to listen to the radio,
and sometimes on Sundays
they'd take one of the
interurban trains out to the
beach for a picnic.

The mimicry here may be a little too close for comfort.

Better is Parker's Chapter 20, for my money his best writing in this book. There he more than imitates Chandler—he recreates him. Marlowe's guilty foray into a sleazy saloon and his manipulative flirtation with a barfly seem to echo some of Chandler's most powerful pages, ones in which he tangles with rummies in *Farewell, My Lovely* and *The Lady in the Lake*. Parker excells with the poetry of disgust, and uses one of Chandler's signature words—"smeared"—showing this reader that his understanding of Chandler goes deeper than superficial imitation.

It's all there: the knightly imagery, the gigantic house or castle remembered from the beginnings of *The Big Sleep* and *The High Window*, the flashy figures of speech like "She got some wine in. She was drinking it as if the four horsemen of the Apocalypse had been sighted in Encino." Yet the necessary emphasis on Marlowe's marital conflicts takes us away from strength and toward weakness. Chandler himself questioned whether Marlowe should or could ever marry—it would be "quite out of character," he wrote in the year of his death.

And so it is. Robert Parker's continuation of a project that Chandler himself might have abandoned if he had lived longer is a shrewd and professional one. *Poodle Springs* is definitely worthwhile for anyone in the market for a detective story—it's enjoyable, entertaining, and satisfying. But it does not evade a flaw inherent in the project itself: its central action is a first-rate recreation of second-rate Chandler—the Chandler who wrote the Linda Loring passages from *The Long Goodbye*, *Playback*, and the first four chapters of *Poodle Springs*.

J.O. Tate is a professor of English at Dowling College, on Long Island.

REVISIONS

A MATTER OF TRAINING

It is depressing to reflect, from the perspective of 1989, that John S. Tuckey could write (in his *Mark Twain and Little Satan*, 1963) of the author of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that, in composing the nihilistic fantasies that preoccupied him toward the close of his life, he in effect denied "that art must have access to nature, must nourish itself on reality, must have matter as well as form"—that he ended his life at such a remove from his formative experiences of Hannibal and Virginia City, Nevada, as to impel him to redirect his genius toward making "something out of nothing." The creator of Huck Finn the literary precursor and adumbrator of Samuel Beckett and Kurt Vonnegut! The sad truth is that to a degree he was—and yet he did not go joyously into that dark night of the soul, nor could he ever acquiesce in it absolutely. In an essay published only weeks before his death in 1910, he declared: "the scene of the real turning point in my life (and yours) was the Garden of Eden."

The subject of Twain's deepening pessimism in the last decades of his life has been a major one for critics and biographers for more than eighty years. In *Mark Twain and Science: Adventure of a Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press; 224 pp., $27.50), Sherwood Cummings has produced a fascinating study explicating what he calls the writer's "major intellectual problem, both as a private person and as an author": namely, "that before acquiescing in the world view of modern science he had established indissoluble loyalties, first to a theistic world view and later to a deistic one." In middle age, Twain himself averred that, "the religious folly you are born in you will die in, no matter what apparently reasonabler religious folly may seem to have taken its place meanwhile and abolished and obliterated it." As it happened, Mark Twain lived long enough to discover how simplistic that formulation was, at least in its application to himself.

In his 75 mortal years, Twain lived successively through four separate and distinct cultures—Calvinistic, Deistic, evangelical Christian, and post-Darwinian-scientific—in each of which he was imaginatively and intellectually involved; these cultures, Cummings tells us, "laid down incompatible strata in his mind." Moreover, as he moved from one culture into the next, he found himself temperamentally incapable of sloughing off certain assumptions gained from the one, even as he was eagerly embracing contradictory assumptions acquired from the other.

As he moved deeper into contemplation of the human condition, he concluded, first, that the Creation was in fact vile; later, in order to exorcise the revulsion this idea caused him, he decided that human behavior was determined by infrangible laws of nature to such a degree that moral judgments were simply beside the point. Expertly, Cummings shows how Twain set these conflicting ideas, feelings, and assumptions in dramatic opposition in his novels as well as in his other writings, undercutting and contradicting himself as he moved from one project to the next; never, despite the intellectual frenzy in which he approached the impasse at the end, achieving either intellectual reconciliation or simple piece of mind. The story is beyond being a sad one. It is a synedoche for the real American Tragedy; and the root of it, one is drawn to conclude, is a certain failure of training.

Mark Twain's famous gingerbread story—of how as a child, assured by his first teacher that whosoever prayed for a thing earnestly and with desire would be given that thing, he prayed for gingerbread; failed to receive it; and concluded from the experience that "the X and all other religions are lies and swindles"—was no doubt facetiously intended. Nevertheless, the conclusion he drew from the world in his maturity—that the existence of slavery, the caste system, and other evils precluded the existence of God, and certainly of the Christian God—is hardly less naive. To judge from the case of Mark Twain at least, the schools and churches of Hannibal, Missouri, *circa* 1840 were no more adept at conveying the concept of Original Sin—and other traditional theological ideas—than their counterparts are today. (CW)

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Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Beavers, Banners, and Bulls

◆

Here in Chapel Hill we've had this problem with beavers. They've been damming creeks, as is their wont. Unfortunately in the process they've been turning great areas into marsh and creating a mosquito problem, so last year the old boys of our public works department set out to kill the critters, figuring: no beavers = no dams = no flooding = no problem.

Well, anyone who thinks you can murder beavers with impunity in a college town in the waning years of the American Century has been living on another planet. After the predictable brouhaha in the newspaper, in public meetings, and so forth, the decision was solemnly taken to capture the beasts, sterilize the males, and return them to the wild, where the population is supposed to diminish gradually, by attrition.

But wait. We are not simply to neuter these hapless creatures, as one does with steers, or hogs, or geldings. No, such treatment could cause lasting psychological damage, as one dear lady pointed out, and I don't doubt that she was right. Rather than have distressed eunuch beavers on their consciences, my fellow citizens have anted up their tax money and mine to provide—are you ready for this?—vasectomies for the little fellows. So now we are to have beavers with futile but active sex lives, sort of a rodent version of today's college experience.

Those of you who don't live in college towns don't know what you're missing. Count your blessings. Being a professor means I have to know.

* * *

On the other hand, it also means that I don't have to stick around in the summers. Last June our family spent a couple of weeks in and around Barcelona where (it probably won't surprise you to hear) I had some thoughts about the American South.

To begin with, what can the Confederate flag possibly mean to Europeans?

I keep running into it. On this trip I found it on a postcard at a *snack bar* (French for "snack bar") near Montpellier. A year earlier, outside Conegliano, north of Venice, I'd run across a factory with an imposing array of flags out front: the Common Market nations, Japan, the US—and the Confederate States of America. Later, in the market, at a booth selling decals, stickers, and lapel pins, I'd found, with the Grateful Dead, a picture of Elvis—superimposed on the battle flag of the CSA (on the back, the legend "Made in Canada"). Later still, in the Austrian town of Villach, near the Italian and Yugoslav frontiers, an army surplus store obviously catering to flaming youth flew, out front, the Stars and Stripes with a Harley-Davidson roaring out of it—and the battle flag. Back in Italy, on the autostrada from Venice to Milan, I passed a tractor-trailer cab wallpapered with—a giant Confederate flag. In Paris, in the Latin Quarter, I paused at a shop selling cheap straw hats, pocket books, postcards, and—the flag.

What's going on here? Does anybody know? I suspect this display hasn't much to do with the Confederate States of America. (If it does, though, where were these allies when we needed them?) Rather, thanks no doubt to a motley assortment of white Southern musicians ranging from Hank Williams Jr. and Alabama, to Lynyrd Skynyrd and the Allman Brothers, on back (yes) to Elvis and Buddy and Jerry Lee—thanks to these ambassadors, for many good old European boys emblems of the South connote good-timing, beer-drinking, hell-raising freedom and rebellion. (The Italian factory is another story. I'll bet they just ordered up a couple of dozen assorted flags from a wholesaler.)

To the point is a group we ran into in Barcelona. At first glance "Los Huevos" looked like your typical Euro-scum rock band: a half-dozen long-haired musicians, Jaggeresque lead singer. But they were cooking in a particularly down-home mode, featuring a fine harmonica player. No Confederate flags were in evidence, but the guitarist wore a Jack Daniels T-shirt.

* * *

To an outsider, a newcomer, of course, what is Spanish about Barcelona is more striking than what is not. On the television at our hotel, for instance, we encountered bullfighting, complete

LIBERAL ARTS

ON WOMEN WHO DO, AND MEN WHO DO NOT

These facts on fat just released from the Nutri/System Health and Fitness Information Bureau:

—Happily married women gain an average of 18.4 pounds in the first 13 years of marriage, while unhappy wives bulk up on an average of 42.6 pounds during the same period.

—Just about as many men as women go grocery shopping—96 percent of women shop at least once a month, while 92 percent of men do. Women love shopping lists and discount coupons, while men tend to be impulse buyers and can't be bothered with coupons.

—*from the* Milwaukee Journal, *September 6, 1989*

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with slow-motion instant replay. I was surprised not to find the spectacle more disturbing. In fact it was riveting. It has been remarked that a bullfight is not a sport but a tragedy. (All right, so I've been reading *Death in the Afternoon*. It makes a lot more sense now.) Anyway, the next Sunday evening found my daughter and me at the *plaza de toros*, me bareheaded lest a Durham baseball cap that said "Bulls" be thought in poor taste. In a little over two hours we saw six bulls dispatched with varying degrees of artistry. So far as I know, no one has ever proposed to do vasectomies instead, but that could be a heck of a show, too.

As I say, we knew we were in Spain. But we were also constantly reminded that we were in Catalonia, and the distinction Catalans often make between the Spanish "state" and the Catalan "nation" is easily and sympathetically grasped by someone from a place where caps and bumper stickers say "American by birth / Southern by the grace of God."

Want a quick tour of Barcelona? Walk away from the harbor that once served Romans and Phoenicians. You come first to the medieval "Gothic Quarter" around the cathedral, then to spacious neighborhoods of boulevards and cafes that feel like Paris without the tourists, finally to execrable high-rise worker-warrens that should merely be passed through as quickly as possible — which is usually not quickly at all, given the gruesome traffic. Moses Hadas remarked once that "a subject people's only glories are departed ones" and Catalonia's cultural high-water marks came in the 12th century and in the first third of this one, which makes for some fine Romanesque and *art nouveau* architecture.

The most famous building, of course, almost the city's signature, is Gaudi's unfinished sand-castle church of Sagrada Familia. Its original plan calls for a sculptured devil in the form of a serpent, handing a bomb to an anarchist worker. Gaudi was an early victim of the Barcelona traffic, run down by a tram before he lived to see the Civil War, but he knew an enemy when he saw one. In the cloister of the old cathedral is a chapel dedicated to 930 priests, monks, and nuns of the diocese murdered in that war, many by anarchists. (If those killed by the Nationalists have a memorial now I didn't see it.)

After the war, Catalan autonomist sentiment was vigorously suppressed by the Franco regime. In particular, the Catalan language was expunged from the schools and public life. Since Franco's death, however, restrictions on Catalan have gone the way of bikini tops on the Costa Brava. Now Castilian Spanish has little more standing in Catalonia than English does in Quebec. A tourist can get along pretty well with Castilian only because most waiters and hotel staff seem to be Spanish-speaking migrants from the impoverished South; as one moves up the economic ladder Barcelonans tend more and more to be bilingual, and some refuse to speak Castilian on principle. Newcomers are encouraged to learn Catalan, and to all appearances are fully accepted once they've done so. Road signs are provided in both Catalan and Castilian, but the Castilian has often been effaced by language vigilantes with spray paint. Meanwhile the Catalan flag of four red stripes on a yellow field, representing the bloody fingerprints of a national hero, is everywhere.

Elsewhere (across the French border in "Occitania," for instance) the typical separatist is usually a member of the petit-intelligentsia who dreams of being minister of culture or ambassador to the Court of St. James's instead of senior lecturer in sociology at a provincial university. But Catalan nationalism's appeal is both broader and deeper. The major nationalist party is headed by a banker. That may help to explain why Catalans, who can be unreliable Spaniards, seem to be good Europeans. As it's usually presented, "Europe" strikes me as an idea that only a chamber of commerce could love, but Barcelona has always been a bourgeois city of merchants and manufacturers, many of whom would prefer to think of their town as a major European metropolis rather than the second city of Spain.

In other quarters, I suspect, the appeal of "Europe" is that it may eventually make Spain obsolete. There's an image lurking about of the New Europe as a loose confederation of communities: Catalans, Flemings, Bretons, Alsatians, Basques, Occitans, Welsh — in time maybe Croats, Vlachs, Lapps, Ukrainians, who knows? This vision of all the old, suppressed, organic nations rising up, shaking free of the artificial strictures of states, becoming fully themselves — this pluralistic vision conflicts with the ambitions of the Eurocrats in Strasbourg, but it's a lovely, romantic idea, and I wish it well. It reminds me of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, when the king gives each district of London its independence. Pointing to "old inviolate Notting Hill," he says: "Look up nightly to that peak, my child, where it lifts itself among the stars so ancient, so lonely, so unutterably Notting."

John Shelton Reed writes from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where he is a professor of sociology at a provincial university.

Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

Make a Joyful Noise. Awomen.

◆

Two years ago, because it felt inevitable and right, I took the happy leap of faith that I had been approaching for years and became a Catholic. The reasons why are perhaps fodder for another letter at another time. Let me just say here and now that current church music and liturgy were *not* among the compelling forces.

Not that mackerel-snappers are worse in those respects than any other denomination — but that's my point. They sound just *like* any other denomination, and all of them are pretty lame these days when it comes to the glorious possibilities of the sung English language as a path to the salvation of the soul. I expected more from the church that spawned Palestrina, the church in which Christ's presence in the Eucharist is not considered merely symbolic. (As Flannery O'Connor said, if it's just a *symbol*, then to Hell with it.) I expected more from the church that gave rise, literally, to the great cathedrals and can trace its popes directly back to the day when Christ commissioned Peter. In short, I expect-

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ed less silliness.

Most egregious among the Catholic Church's linguistic sins are those it shares with other mainline churches: the "corrections" to avoid "sexism." "Sexism" is defined, by those who make such decisions, in two contradictory ways: as any action or language hinting that there is a *difference* between men and women, that we might possibly have complementary responsibilities in the church and in life; and, alternately, any language in which the male gender is presumed to *include* the female. It's a bore, these days, to bash wimmin's lib—like communism, it's a bankrupt ideology and everybody *knows* it—but somehow these people are still allowed to interfere with *real* church business. My husband and I each teach a Tuesday-night third-grade CCD class, and at the "commissioning" of the teachers, we did all the right things, including "journaling," which wasn't journaling at all—that would have been bad enough—but merely writing on paper intimate things about ourselves to "share" with the persons sitting near us while some wacky space-music played too loudly. When it came time for the prayer and responses, the CCD coordinator—a lovely woman whose salary the church pays—carefully changed every "His" to "God's." The Devil made me ask her *why* she'd done that. We got a five-minute explanation about the genderlessness of God and the creative power of the womb, and how we should teach our classes that God is both male and female. Then we said the "Our Father."

Some modern musical emendations are puzzling but harmless, such as changing "Brothers all are we" to "We are family," and "Let me walk with my brother" to "Let us walk with each other" in "Let There Be Peace on Earth" (1955). I'd even be charitable enough to call these two changes improvements—if I didn't hate the tune so much. It screams for an accordion.

On the other hand, consider "How Great Thou Art." Frankly, I don't like many hymns that aren't at least one hundred years old (the German and English ones are the best, although some of the old Negro spirituals are exquisite), and this one has always seemed like *exactly* the kind of selection that should be featured—as it so often is—on a "Greatest Gospel Hits" album ("Order Before Midnight Tonight and Receive FREE This Lovely Cubic Zirconia 'Last Supper' Dashboard Ornament"). Still, the song rhymes and scans, I can whistle it in the shower, and it's got twenty years on most of the other songs we sing. Why, though, did the Oregon Catholic Press, which publishes the yearly music issue accompanying the seasonal missal that my church uses, feel compelled to change "all the works thy hands have made" to "all the *worlds* thy hands have made," and "mighty thunder" to "*rolling* thunder"? My husband and I decided that the words "works" and "mighty" were deleted because they offended the sensibilities of some small, lazy minority—children? More probably, though, the two words were simply felt to be too . . . manly.

Rhyming and scanning (to say nothing of making sense) *are* precious commodities in the liturgical music of today. My husband's all-time least favorite song has to be this "Hosea":

> Come back to me / with all
> your heart.
> Don't let fear / keep us apart.
> Trees do bend, / though straight
> and tall;
> So must we / to others call.
>
> The wilderness / will lead you
> To your heart / where I
> will speak.
> Integrity / and justice
> With tenderness / you shall
> know.
>
> You shall sleep / secure with
> peace;
> Faithfulness / will be your joy.
>
> Long have I waited for your
> coming home to me
> And living deeply our new life."

Riveting, isn't it?—whatever it might mean. Couple these words with a pachydermal 4/4 dirge-tune and you've got instant narcosis. I give it a 70, Dick; it's hard to dance to.

The song that makes *me* shudder is:

> One bread, one body, one Lord
> of all,
> One cup of blessing which
> we bless[?].
>
> And we, though many,
> throughout the earth,
> We are one body in this
> one Lord.
>
> Gentile or Jew, servant or free,
> woman or man, no more.

Give me "Old Hundredth" any day. Actually the words here are more or less scriptural; it's the *tune* that sounds like the lowing of many cattle. But I believe I like even *this* song better than the numerous "shalom" songs (with mandatory, embarrassing, choreographed actions) giving off the faint, cloyed odor of false ecumenism. Catholic nuns who like to dress like all the rest of us, and women who attend "women bonding seminars" are especially enthusiastic about the "shalom" songs.

As for the introductory rites and liturgies of the Word and the Eucharist, I haven't much except the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer with which to compare their language, and even the Episcopalians have sacrificed that gorgeous tool of reverence to modern fads. The language in the Catholic "missalette" (what further proof that the Mass has been demeaned?) does what its designers intended—makes the Mass accessible to even the least educated or discerning among us—and who would be foolish enough to say that that is lamentable? But what I try to do, when I remember to, is rise *above* my baseness, and, aside from the lessons and the Gospel reading and sometimes the homily, there is little in the rest of the service that helps me do that. I want a wonderful string of words, heavy with meaning, to muse upon, a turn of phrase that embodies all poetry and all truth. "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint": something like that. I need reassurance that, bad as I am, I am not bad alone, and can be healed. Think of the sad handful of really good American novelists of the past decade, and then think of all the self-christened writers messing with our souls' food. It's a sin.

And while we're on the subject: since when are word-lovers the one minority that can be abused with impunity?

Jane Greer edits Plains Poetry Journal *in Bismarck, North Dakota.*

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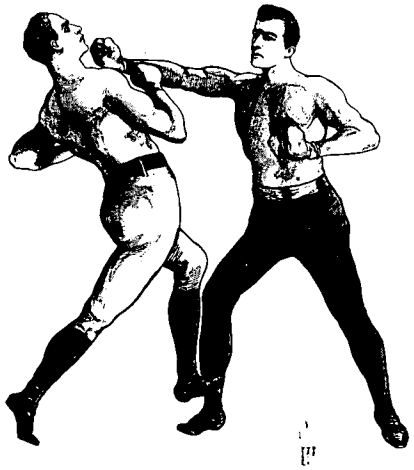
WORDS IN COLLISION



The Puritan and the Profligate

John Lofton Interviews Allen Ginsberg

Lofton: In the first section of your poem "Howl" you wrote: "I saw the best young minds of my generation destroyed by madness." Did this also apply to you?

Ginsberg: That's not an accurate quotation. I said the "best minds," not "the best young minds." This is what is called hyperbole, an exaggerated statement, sort of a romantic statement. And I suppose it could apply to me, too, or anybody. It cuts both ways. People who survived and became prosperous in a basically aggressive, warlike society are in, a sense, destroyed by madness. Those who freaked out and couldn't make it, or were traumatized, or artists who starved, or what not, they couldn't make it, either. It kinda cuts both ways. There's an element of humor there.

Lofton: When you say you suppose this could have applied to you, does this mean you don't know if you are mad?

Ginsberg: Well, who does? I mean everybody is a little mad.

Lofton: But I'm asking you.

Ginsberg: Everybody is a little bit mad. You are perhaps taking this a little too literally. There are several kinds of madness; divine madness. And in the Western tradition there is what Plato called—

Lofton: But I'm talking about this in the sense you spoke of in your 1949 poem "Bop Lyrics," when you wrote: "I'm so lucky to be nutty."

Ginsberg: You're misinterpeting the way I'm using the words.

Lofton: No, I'm asking you a question. I'm not interpreting anything.

Ginsberg: I'm afraid that your linguistic presupposition is, as you define it, that "nutty" means insanity rather than inspiration. You are interpreting, though you say you aren't, by choosing one or another definition and excluding another. So I think you'll have to admit you are interpreting.

Lofton: Actually, I don't admit that.

Ginsberg: You don't want to admit *nuttin'*! But you want me to admit something. Come on. Come off it. Don't be a prig.

Lofton: No, I just want to ask you a question.

Ginsberg: No, you're not just asking me a question. You're *first* interpreting the language and wanting me to use the idea the way you use it. [But] it's my words. And I'm trying to explain to you what it meant.

Lofton: On the contrary, I was asking you what you meant by what you wrote.

Ginsberg: Oh, I see. It's a double use of the word "madness" or "crazy" or "nutty." But if you'll listen to this tape you'll find you asked to exclude one aspect and wanted "nutty" to mean "crazy" or "insane." And that's why I say you are interpreting and not wishing to use the language as I had originally set it out. And you weren't interested in my explanation. Are we communicating or just sparring?

Lofton: I think you can do both. It's not either/or.

Ginsberg: All right. All right. But you have to remember what we're saying. You can't amnesize what we were saying. I feel you're trying to avoid recognition of the fact that you were trying to exclude *both* meanings of the word "crazy."

Lofton: No, I'm just trying to understand what you meant by what you wrote. But this question of madness—

Ginsberg: There's also another background. In Zen Buddhism there is wild wisdom, or crazy wisdom, crazy in the sense of wild, unlimited, unbounded. Or as in jazz, when someone plays a beautiful riff or extemporizes, they say crazy man.

Lofton: But I am interested in this question of your possible madness. It's not a gratuitous question. There is a history of madness in your family.

Ginsberg: Very much so.

Lofton: Your mom died in 1956 in a mental institution. So my question is not cute or facetious. And the *Current Biography Yearbook* for 1987 says that when a roommate of yours, in 1949, stole to support his drug habit, and was arrested, you were implicated circumstantially and pleaded a psychological disability and spent eight months in the Columbia Psychiatric Institute. What was this psychiatric disability and why did you spend just eight months in this institute?

Ginsberg: Well, I had sort of a visionary experience in which I heard William Blake's voice. It was probably an auditory hallucination but was a very rich experience.

Lofton: This happened while you were masturbating, right?

Ginsberg: Yes, but *after*.

Lofton: Not during, but after?

Ginsberg: After. Did you read this in the *Paris Review*?

Lofton: No, in the *Current Biography Yearbook* for 1987. But I want to ask you about your roommate, this drug arrest and this psychiatric disability you pleaded.

Ginsberg: No, no, no, no, no, no, no

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John Lofton

George Holmes

Allen Ginsberg

no. Sir, first of all your tone is too aggressive. You have to soften your tone because there's an element of aggression here. There's an element almost like a police interrogation here.

Lofton: But that's not all bad. The police, in some instances, do a good job, particularly in dealing with criminals.

Ginsberg: Sir, in this case it's a little impolite. You're being a little harsh and unfriendly and making it very difficult to relate to you gently and talk unguardedly and candidly because there is an element of manipulativeness in the way you're asking questions. You don't feel that at all?

Lofton: No.

Ginsberg: No element of manipulativeness or coercion or aggression or a hard edge here that is supposed to put me at a disadvantage?

Lofton: There's no doubt that from what I've read about you, I don't like what you have stood for over the years. I don't like your politics, the kind of sex you engage in. So, if you mean there's a hostility here towards what you are, absolutely [there is].

Ginsberg: But you're talking to me as if I'm an object of some kind and not a person in front of you. There's an element of abusiveness in the way you're talking to me—your tone of voice and interrogative method in which I seem to have to answer yes or no.

Lofton: But an interview is an interrogation.

Ginsberg: Or it can be a conversation, a little warmer. It can have a little more sense of respect and less sense of hard-edged, police-like interrogation. I'm asking you, in a sense, to watch your manners.

Lofton: That's interesting because I'm not asking you to respond in any particular way. Why are you telling me how to ask questions? You can use any tone you like. . . . So, can we return to my question? What was this psychiatric disability that put you in an institute for eight months?

Ginsberg: Well, I'm not sure it really was a disability to begin with. So I can't answer the question the way you propose it.

Lofton: But I'm asking you if it's true, as the *Current Biography Yearbook* has reported, that you had this disability?

Ginsberg: It's neither true nor not true. Now, do you know about that?

Lofton: But it is true that you were in an institute?

Ginsberg: Yes, I was. I had a kind of visionary experience relating to a text by William Blake, "The Sick Rose."

Lofton: "The Sick Rose"?

Ginsberg: Yes, it went: "O rose, thou art sick! / The invisible worm / That flies in the night, / In the howling storm, / Has found out thy bed / Of crimson joy, / And his dark secret love / Does thy life destroy." So, it's a very mysterious, interesting poem that keyed off a kind of religious experience, a visionary experience, a hallucinatory experience—whichever way you want to interpret it. All three descriptions are applicable and possible. Reality has many aspects.

Lofton: Were you using drugs while you masturbated [and had this experience]?

Ginsberg: Not at all. I had been living very quietly, eating vegetarian diets, seeing very few people and reading a great many religious texts: St. John of the Cross, the Bible, Plato's *Phaedra*, St. Teresa of Avila, and Blake. So I was in a kind of solitary, contemplative mood.

Lofton: Did you put yourself into this institute?

Ginsberg: More or less. Because I questioned my own sense of reality and I couldn't figure out what the significance of the illuminative experience was, whether it was a kind of traditional

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experience, religious experience, that you might find within James's book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* where there is a sudden sense of vastness and ancientness and respect and devotional awareness or sacredness to the whole universe. Or whether this was a by-product of some lack-love longing and projection of the world with my own feelings, or some nutty breakthrough.

Lofton: What made you think anyone at the Columbia Psychiatric Institute would have any light to shed on what you thought your problem was?

Ginsberg: Well, I was very young [*about* 22].

Lofton: Did they help you find reality?

Ginsberg: I don't think there's any single reality. They helped me relate to my own desires.

Lofton: You think you were better when you got out of there?

Ginsberg: I think they said I wasn't ever really psychotic or crazy, just an average neurotic.

Lofton: Did they think it was normal to have the experience you had after masturbating?

Ginsberg: No, but you could say perhaps normal or average, yes. People have very many extraordinary experiences in their lives, whether or not connected with having masturbated, although most people do masturbate.

Lofton: But, clearly, you thought something was wrong with you or you wouldn't have gone to this institute, right?

Ginsberg: Well, I wasn't thinking it was exactly wrong—

Lofton: But something was out of whack. You went there for some reason.

Ginsberg: You're putting words in my mouth.

Lofton: No, I'm asking you a question.

Ginsberg: No, you're asserting something—that I thought something was wrong.

Lofton: But someone doesn't go to a psychiatric institute because he thinks everything is OK, does he?

Ginsberg: You might very well do that, depending on what you mean by "out of whack" or "OK." Actually, I was more inquisitive as to what the nature of my experience was, and I thought I would be able to find out that way.

Lofton: Did you go to anywhere else besides this institute?

Ginsberg: Oh, later—I'm going to a psychiatrist now.

Lofton: How long have you been in therapy?

Ginsberg: About three years. I went through about five years when I was in my 20's, and about three years now.

Lofton: Why are you in therapy?

Ginsberg: To see what the structure of my uh, uh—to sort of like get down to the bed-rock root and see what has conditioned me to be the way I am. To examine the texture of my feelings, whether my experience with my family has at all been sort of like digested and absorbed and whether I'm handling it properly and whether I know my own emotions, and sort of exploring the depths of my own feelings.

Lofton: What makes you think the people you are going to now know anything about this?

Ginsberg: It's not that they *know*. It's whether they're—it's not like—it depends on what you mean by "know." What do you mean by "know"?

Lofton: Well, I could ask that this depends on what you mean by what I mean by "know," but this wouldn't give us much of an interview if we do a whole lot of this.

Ginsberg: Some sense of warmth, trust, and intelligence that goes back and forth between myself and my psychiatrist. It's an experiential matter that gives me confidence to have a trusting relation and to discuss my problems with another person.

Lofton: But you could have a trusting relationship with your barber.

Ginsberg: I have trusting relationships with people who are not psychiatrists and I talk to them, too. But a psychiatrist is trained, generally, to check through habit patterns. It's a very specialized thing. It may not be very much superior to just an ordinary wise person that you might talk to or someone who has more handy experience. . . .

Lofton: I assume you're going to a secular humanist-type psychiatrist.

Ginsberg: I never inquired about her religious beliefs.

Lofton: Really? So you're going to someone whose religious beliefs, whose presuppositions, you know nothing about?

Ginsberg: Not all their presuppositions.

Lofton: Do you know *any* of them?

Ginsberg: Some, by body language and the response to the immediate situation in front of me, which is what I am really interested in rather than, say, in this conversation. I'm dealing with

LIBERAL ARTS

THE POET AS BARBARIAN

A poet in our times is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community. He lives in the days that are past. His ideas, thoughts, feelings, associations, are all with barbarous manners, obsolete customs, and exploded superstitions. The march of his intellect is like that of a crab, backward. The brighter the light diffused around him by the progress of reason, the thicker is the darkness of antiquated barbarism, in which he buries himself like a mole, to throw up the barren hillocks of his Cimmerian labours . . . The highest inspirations of poetry are resolvable into three ingredients: the rant of unregulated passion, the whine of exaggerated feeling, and the cant of factitious sentiment: and can therefore serve only to ripen a splendid lunatic like Alexander, a puling drivellor like Werter, or a morbid dreamer like Wordsworth.

—*T.L. Peacock*, Four Ages of Poetry

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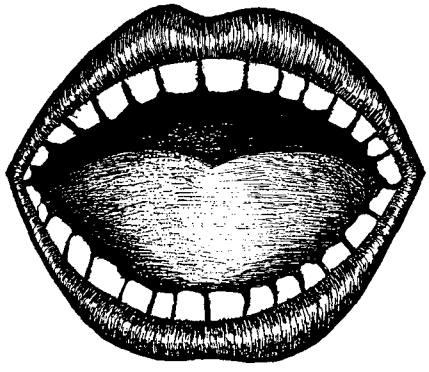
you in terms of how you display yourself here, not the history of your thoughts. I'm trying to deal with the evidence or manifestation of how you present yourself here—your harshness, aggression, and insistency and—
Lofton: Why not call it my perseverance? Isn't that a nicer word? Or guts? Or tenacity?
Ginsberg: I would say there is a little element of S&M in your approach. Power.
Lofton: No, I would say this is more like the kind of sex you like.
Ginsberg: And I would say this is the kind of power relationship you like, judging from your behavior.
Lofton: Well, that's certainly what S&M is all about, power.
Ginsberg: And you seem to like that, don't you? Have your sexual fantasies ever involved that kind of power relationship?
Lofton: No, not to my knowledge. I'm a Christian. So I don't fantasize.
Ginsberg: I know. But so is Jimmy Swaggart.
Lofton: No, I think that we're finding out that Jimmy Swaggart wasn't a Christian and that was his problem.
Ginsberg: Do you ever have any sexual fantasies?
Lofton: No.
Ginsberg: None at all?
Lofton: No. I said I am a Christian.
Ginsberg: You've never had *any* sexual fantasies?
Lofton: Before I was a Christian, I had them, absolutely.
Ginsberg: And since you're a Christian you don't?
Lofton: No.
Ginsberg: And when you had them did they involve any dominance/submission fantasies?
Lofton: Mine were pretty orthodox heterosexual kind of fantasies. But there's no doubt they were bad. And I am so glad that Jesus Christ delivered me from them.
Ginsberg: So you don't have any at all now?
Lofton: No.
Ginsberg: You have no erotic dreams, at all, that you remember?
Lofton: None that don't feature my wife, no.
Ginsberg: Yeah.
Lofton: It's an amazing thing what Jesus can do for a person.
Ginsberg: Uh-huh.
Lofton: The power of the Holy Spirit. . . . Do you feel that after these years of therapy that you're any closer to knowing more—
Ginsberg: Yes.
Lofton: Like what?
Ginsberg: I think some of that is



rather private.
Lofton: Fair enough.
Ginsberg: But they would relate to some of what I have written about in my poems "Kaddish" and "White Shroud". . .
Lofton: Let's talk about some of your feelings over the years and see if they should be respected. An April 21, 1978, *Boston Globe* story says that when you were on a local TV show you shared your sexual preference for "young boys" and this caused an instant irate reaction from mothers watching—
Ginsberg: A few. Not that many.
Lofton: A few mothers who had children home on vacation from school. Is this an accurate report? That you do have a sexual preference for "young boys"?
Ginsberg: No, no, no. It's not accurate in the context of the broadcast.
Lofton: Did you say you had a sexual preference for "young boys"?
Ginsberg: We're not on trial here. I'm trying to explain—
Lofton: But, in a way, we're all on trial.
Ginsberg: Well then you must excuse me if I don't adopt the submissive attitude you wish. . . . I got on the air and said that when I was young I was approached by an older man and I don't think it did me any harm. And that I like younger boys and I think that probably almost everybody has an inclination that is erotic toward younger people, including younger boys.
Lofton: How young were the boys?
Ginsberg: In my case, I'd say 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.
Lofton: That you had sex with?
Ginsberg: No, unfortunately I haven't had the chance [*laughs*]. No, I'm talking about my desires. I'm being frank and candid. And I'm also saying that if anyone was frank and candid, you'd probably find that in anybody's breast. The—
Lofton: But why? Why do you persist in imputing your own rottenness to other people?
Ginsberg: One moment. Your question is: why do I persist in imputing my own *rottenness* to other people?
Lofton: That's right.
Ginsberg: Is this a newspaper interview or is it—
Lofton: I'm a columnist who writes commentary and opinion.
Ginsberg: You realize that you're using language which could be considered insulting.
Lofton: I hope so. I think it's a rotten preference to want to have sex with young boys.
Ginsberg: You feel that it's part of your role to sit here and insult me?
Lofton: Do you feel you should be insult-proof?
Ginsberg: No, but in this circumstance you might have better manners.
Lofton: You're a little hung up on manners, I think.
Ginsberg: You might couch your conversation with me a little more politely since—
Lofton: Why? Why should I be polite? I think to have sexual preferences for young boys is rotten. I can't say that?
Ginsberg: Yeah. But you want me to say it, too. . . . It seems you're being so abusive that it takes a great deal of patience to be your host and to allow you to try to manipulate the situation.
Lofton: But I don't think it's true that most people want to have sex with younger people.
Ginsberg: I didn't say that. You're taking words out of my mouth.
Lofton: That is what you said.
Ginsberg: No, I said that—we have this on tape, you know.
Lofton: That we do, and I won't burn this tape.
Ginsberg: What I said was that most people have erotic desires for young people. And that doesn't mean they

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would actually want to—
Lofton: What do you mean "most people"? Where do you get your data?
Ginsberg: Well, I'm just speaking as a human being poet who's been around 61 years, a little older than you.
Lofton: But that doesn't mean, necessarily, that you're smarter.
Ginsberg: No, but that's my experience. If you go back and talk to old folks—they don't see it as horrible. They see it as part of the charm of—
Lofton: Yeah. Well, maybe you've been running around with the wrong people.
Ginsberg: Maybe you're not wanting to listen to the whole sense of eros here.
Lofton: I don't doubt that most of the people you've run with have wanted to have sex with young people. I'm just suggesting that their views don't reflect the views of all Americans.
Ginsberg: I didn't say have sex. I said most people have a kind of erotic attraction to younger people.
Lofton: You mean a fantasy they don't want to act on?
Ginsberg: Most don't act on it. Of course not. But most people have in their breasts an erotic pleasure for younger people.
Lofton: You've repeated that several times. And I'm denying it. But I'm not denying the people you ran with felt this way.
Ginsberg: It's a kind of granny-wisdom. And you're overreacting to it.
Lofton: I don't think your grandmother would have told you this.
Ginsberg: You're overreacting to the notion that—
Lofton: I hope so.
Ginsberg: You're interpreting it in sort of a negative way. This is a part of the general spectrum of human charm and emotion rather than sin or rottenness as you say.
Lofton: I think most people reading this interview will agree that the desire to have sex with young boys is *rotten*.
Ginsberg: It depends on where you publish it.
Lofton: That's right. If you publish it in the pedophile community, you'll get a large amount of support.
Ginsberg: If you publish it in the *Times* or *The Washington Post*, people will say well, Ginsberg is just talking normal, humanistic, obvious old granny wisdom like you can find in Shakespeare.
Lofton: Okay. We obviously had different kinds of grandmothers. . . . Do you now have a desire to have sex with young boys?
Ginsberg: I have a sexual desire for them, I must say, yes.
Lofton: Still?
Ginsberg: Oh, the older I get, the more.
Lofton: And after six years of therapy, too. This therapy must *really* be doing a good job.
Ginsberg: You know what the therapy does?
Lofton: It probably tells you it's fine, just get comfortable with it, right?
Ginsberg: No, not quite. . . . Usually it's a discussion of where this comes from and trying to find the origin of it. And find what conditioning affected me that I arrived at this particular orientation. That's all.
Lofton: How about sin? Is it a possibility that you are a sinner?
Ginsberg: That doesn't come into play. What comes into play is an attempt to cultivate an awareness of the situation so that if there are any harmful consequences, in myself or others, they can be seen through and avoided. The attempt is to understand the situation, not categorize it with knee-jerk words like "sin," but to understand the roots of it historically and what the personal experience roots were.
Lofton: Well, sin goes back pretty far.
Ginsberg: And then relate to the direct personal experience in a way that will take the sting out of it in a sense of doing harm to others or yourself.
Lofton: But this sexual preference for young boys doesn't seem to be something you want to be delivered from. You smile when you talk about it. You don't want to be cured of this, do you?
Ginsberg: I should say my sexual preference is not exclusively for young boys, but also for middle-aged men, straight men, and women. I've occasionally had fantasies about making out with trucks as well as beasts. And maybe I'll be making out with you before it's all over [*laughs*].
Lofton: Well, maybe I could drive that truck while you make out with it, perhaps an 18-wheeler, with the pedal-to-the-metal.
Ginsberg: Now there's your fantasy [*laughs*].

LIBERAL ARTS

A CAMEL IS A HORSE . . .

Dallas City Council members last week decided to put aside their normal slate of business and talk about why their meetings run so long.

The discussion took 90 minutes.

"The problem is, we all talk too much on the council," said member Lori Palmer, prompting Mayor Annette Strauss to admonish council members to manage themselves better.

Then—you guessed it—she appointed a committee to study the problem.

—*from the* Houston Chronicle, *September 10, 1989*

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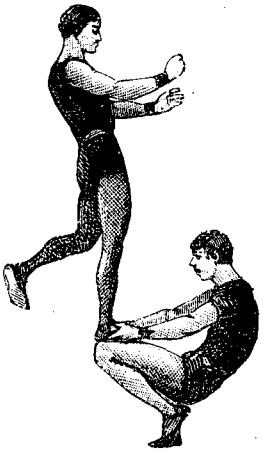
Lofton: Excuse me, but *you* raised the idea of having sex with a truck.
Ginsberg: You extended it.
Lofton: I'm just trying to accommodate you. And you're attacking me again.
Ginsberg: No, I'm not attacking you at all.
Lofton: I even offered to drive the truck. And you attacked me.
Ginsberg: You sure did.
Lofton: But to hell with you. I *won't* drive the truck. Get your own truck.
Ginsberg: Oh, you can't get out of it that easily. You've already driven the truck in my mind. Gosh, you're funny. But you've got this sort of contentious obsession—God knows what's underneath all that.
Lofton: Well, yes, He does know. . . .
Ginsberg: You've got to remember that I'm talking on the basis of the experience of remembering my unconscious. And maybe you're not as aware of what's going on in your mind as I am. And therefore when you condemn impulses or fantasies that I'm willing to be candid about, you may not be so familiar with your own mind as to know that you do contain—
Lofton: Well, let's clear this up right now. If I had the fantasies you have, I would also consider them rotten. They are rotten not because you have them but because they are rotten desires, preferences.
Ginsberg: But what if you find human nature does contain such a great spectrum of fantasy, a different aspect of reality, as a kind of way of checking out all the possibilities—
Lofton: Mr. Ginsberg, the Book of Jeremiah says that the human heart is *desperately* wicked. You don't have to tell me—a born-again Christian, Calvinist, Reformed, Puritan—about the variety of evil fantasies human beings have. I read the Bible, sir, and it tells us all about this. And it tells what is to be done about this.
Ginsberg: But you don't read your unconscious, the contents of your mind, very carefully. You don't remember your dreams, your daydreams, subliminal thinking.
Lofton: You know why?
Ginsberg: Why?
Lofton: Because I'm not like you. The Scripture, talking about unbelievers, asks the question, why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? (Psalms 2:1). The Scripture tells us to trust the Lord with all our heart and lean *not* to our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5). You are an unbeliever. You lean to your own understanding. You're a heathen who imagines vain things. You have an overactive imagination, a kind of mental cancer.
Ginsberg: No, it's not quite like that. Do you know anything about meditation practice?

[*At this point he says he'll show me how to meditate. I say fine, but ask him*



if he plans to take his clothes off. He says no. I meditate. We resume the interview.]
Lofton: I've read that you are afraid of death.
Ginsberg: No, I was talking more about the pain, like dying under torture, or from cancer of the eyeball. Something like that would bother me. . . .
Lofton: The 1970 *Current Biography* says that you aren't a proselytizer for homosexuality. What does that mean?
Ginsberg: I'm sort of reporting my experience rather than attempting to—
Lofton: So you're not saying that homosexuality is good, or better?
Ginsberg: I'm observing my own mind and consciousness and reporting on that and trying to be candid. Walt Whitman, who was a very great poet and, incidentally, gay, said he thought that for poets and orators of the future the great quality would be candor, frankness, truthfulness—like first-thought-best-thought, the notion of nonmanipulative communication rather than trying to dress it up and look good for the outside.
Lofton: Well, Walt Whitman suffered from, if I may say so, what might be called terminal candor—not unlike yourself. I mean, who cares? You don't have to tell us everything, instantly reporting on everything you feel. Who cares?
Ginsberg: Nobody could report instantly on everything.
Lofton: But some of you have tried hard. You have said you write down every dream you have. You report on every little impulse from the brain.
Ginsberg: But it's like a musician who has to practice and limber up for six or seven hours before he gives a concert. And so you get certain selected dreams and impressions you finally report on in a little book of collected poems. You have to do a lot of writing before you get sort of into shape and get practice enough to get an old dog attitude and are able to do it accurately.
Lofton: Well, some people do this and some people don't.
Ginsberg: Yeah. But the ability to transcribe comes from experience. And you build on it, learning your mistakes and blessings. So I don't think Whitman wrote too much. He's considered a great classic around the world.
Lofton: I don't consider him as such.
Ginsberg: You don't like Whitman?
Lofton: No.
Ginsberg: Have you read Whitman?
Lofton: Some.
Ginsberg: What have you read?
Lofton: It really doesn't matter.
Ginsberg: Do you remember the name of the poem you read?
Lofton: Yes, one that says something like: "So, I make mistakes. I contradict myself. So what? I contain all things." This is absurd. Talk about arrogance.
Ginsberg: Dig this.
Lofton: I'm diggin' it.
Ginsberg: He says: "Do I contradict myself? Very well. I contradict myself. I am large. I contain multitudes." Do you know what he meant by that?
Lofton: Probably nothing good. And I doubt if he knew what he meant.
Ginsberg: Yeah, he did. I know what he meant.
Lofton: How do you know what he meant?
Ginsberg: [*laughs*] Because I am large. I contain multitudes.
Lofton: But you might contradict yourself.

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Ginsberg: Yes. And I certainly will contradict myself.
Lofton: This will be one of your multitudes—the ability to contradict yourself.
Ginsberg: That's what Whitman is saying.
Lofton: It's gibberish.
Ginsberg: That our own minds are so vast that we can wind up contradicting ourselves without having to freak-out about it. It's very similar to what the poet John Keats said about negative capability. He said the quality of a very great poet like Shakespeare was his ability to contain opposite ideas in the mind without an irritable reaching out after fact and reason. Meaning that that part of the mind which judges, and irritably insists on either black or white, is only a small part of the mind. The larger mind observes the contradiction, and contains those contradictions. The mind that notices that it contradicts itself is bigger than the smaller mind that is taking one side or the other.
Lofton: You speak very confidently about this. Where do you get your ideas about what the mind is?
Ginsberg: By the direct observation through meditation practice.
Lofton: But, at most, this would tell you only about *your* mind, wouldn't it? You were making statements about *the* mind.
Ginsberg: Well, then there is the experience of many people who have meditated and written about it over centuries also.
Lofton: But this would still be only the experience of these individual minds, wouldn't it?
Ginsberg: I should say I noticed this about my mind and John Keats noticed it about his mind. . . . Sure, you might want to check out which side is right, which judgment is right, but when you get irritable about it, and insist on one or the other, black or white, it's likely you'll eliminate some information from both sides. Like, for instance, I'm Jewish and I've been to Israel—
Lofton: You're Jewish? You practice the Jewish religion?
Ginsberg: No. I consider myself culturally Jewish.
Lofton: I thought being Jewish was a religion.
Ginsberg: Einstein was not a practitioner, but he was Jewish.
Lofton: What made him Jewish?
Ginsberg: He thought he was Jewish.
Lofton: Is that all you have to do, just think you're Jewish?
Ginsberg: Pretty much so. Or to be born of a family.
Lofton: Do you believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?
Ginsberg: I don't think—my position is more nontheistic than yours, I think. You feel Einstein was not Jewish?
Lofton: As I say, my understanding is that being Jewish is a religion.
Ginsberg: No, it's also cultural. That's my understanding as a Jew.
Lofton: But this certainly doesn't comport with what Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob understood a Jew to be.

Ginsberg: Maybe.
Lofton: Maybe?
Ginsberg: But on the other hand, there is an old tradition of the European, cosmopolitan, delicatessen intellectuals like Heinrich Heine, Thomas Mann, Einstein, and Freud, who were always considered Jewish and heroes of 19th- and 20th-century Jewish culture. They weren't necessarily orthodox, but socially Jewish.
Lofton: You know what? I'm more Jewish than you.
Ginsberg: It may be, because you have more adherence to what they call the Judeo-Christian tradition to the extent that it is called monotheism.
Lofton: No, no, no. As Christian I am more Jewish than you because I believe in the Old Testament.
Ginsberg: I see. Well, I think the Old Testament is great. But—
Lofton: It's great? What does that mean?
Ginsberg: Some of the greatest writing done by human hands.
Lofton: Oh, don't patronize it. Is it *true*? Is it divinely inspired?
Ginsberg: The one thing I can say is that it was written by human hands.
Lofton: But how do you know this? How do you know chimpanzees didn't pound it out on a series of countless typewriters?
Ginsberg: I think they have some old Aramaic transcripts, don't they? . . .
Lofton: Do you believe the human hands you say you believe wrote those manuscripts were guided by God's spirit, as these manuscripts say?
[*He shrugs.*]
Why do you shrug, as if this is a matter of no importance?
Ginsberg: You know what that's like? If you've got a full-grown goose inside a bottle with a narrow neck, how do you get the goose out without breaking the bottle or injuring the goose?
Lofton: And how is the question of the divine inspiration of the Old Testament like your goose in this bottle?
Ginsberg: If you can get the goose out of the bottle, I'll answer your question. Can you get the goose out? . . .
Lofton: It's nonsense.
Ginsberg: No, it isn't. You want me to get the goose out of the bottle?
Lofton: No.
Ginsberg: You want the goose to stay in the bottle?
Lofton: I'd like to know how you got this goose in the bottle.
Ginsberg: The way I'm going to take it out. [*He claps his hands*]. It's out! It was put in with words. And it's taken out with words. . . . The point is not to confuse a verbal paradigm or conceptual statement with an event. . . .
Lofton: Did God give Moses anything?
Ginsberg: I don't know. I wasn't there. Somebody wrote down that He did.
Lofton: But you either believe He did or He didn't.
Ginsberg: No.
Lofton: No? What's the third possibility?
Ginsberg: If you have a choice between two things, take both.
Lofton: Even if they contradict each other?
Ginsberg: Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself. I am large. I contain multitudes. That's the whole point of that.
Lofton: You do not believe in a law of mutual contradiction? You believe

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something can simultaneously be and not be?
Ginsberg: Let's put it this way. All conceptions as to existence of the self, as well as all conceptions as to the nonexistence of the self, as well as all conceptions as to the existence of the supreme self, as well as all conceptions as to the nonexistence of the supreme self—
Lofton: Yeah.
Ginsberg: Are equally arbitrary, being only conceptions.
Lofton: Says who? You?
Ginsberg: Well, you just have to listen to the—
Lofton: Can you prove that what we're doing now is not a dream but is real?
Ginsberg: I think it is part dream. There's an element of dreamlikeness in this—
Lofton: Please, don't go metaphorical on me. Are we here doing this interview, or is this a dream?
Ginsberg: We are both really dreaming it and doing it at once.
Lofton: You're being metaphorical.
Ginsberg: No.
Lofton: No? Okay.
Ginsberg: The quality this situation shares with dreams is the quality of transitoriness. Like a dream, this situation will have disappeared in a day and will be forgotten in a hundred years. So, it gives a certain emptiness to the situation as well as, simultaneously, the situation is quite real.
Lofton: Well, that certainly clears it up. I appreciate that.
Ginsberg: Both. *Both*. Are you following me?
Lofton: Yes. Yes. You said that earlier. I'm very quick. I have a very quick mind.
Ginsberg: But did you understand it? Or did you just say you heard it?
Lofton: I didn't say I understood it.
Ginsberg: If you'll slow down a little, you might actually find it's not so repulsive or repugnant, what I just said.
Lofton: My problem, of course, is that I would, first, have to find what you said comprehensible in order to judge it. That's my first challenge.
Ginsberg: Like it says in the Bible: all flesh is grass. . . . I'm saying that this interview shares the quality of a dream in the sense of vaporousness, emptiness, transitoriness.
Lofton: Well, speak for yourself. But *it's certainly going to be a nightmare* for me to have to transcribe. I can assure you of that.
Ginsberg: You know, there's a good deal of parallel between the rhetoric and the intention of that poem [*"Howl"*] and what you like so much in Jeremiah—telling the cities to repent. The Moloch section of "Howl"—have you read that?
Lofton: Long ago. But look, you attacked a lot in that poem that should have been attacked, all this Moloch-worship. But the problem is that you have no answers. You're a darkness-curser only who lights no candles.
Ginsberg: But the answer I was giving to the impersonality of Moloch was human sympathy. I thought that was an appropriate medicine and a positive suggestion for the culture. . . . It seemed to me that sympathetic attentiveness [*to a sick friend in the hospital, in the poem "Howl"*] was the basic answer to the quality of dehumanization.
Lofton: No. There is nothing more hypocritical than an unbeliever like you attacking somebody else's idolatry. That is rank hypocrisy.
Ginsberg: Well, I think all of us agree that our high-tech, materialistic civilization has some deficiencies in human—
Lofton: You're not listening to me. I say I applaud some of your attacks on Moloch-worship. But what *ought* to be worshiped? If not Moloch, who?
Ginsberg: The alternative I was suggesting was opening up to some kind of softness and sensitivity and human sympathy.
Lofton: No, no, *no*! This won't do it. This is only sentiment. Every human being will worship something, seeking power from either above or below.
Ginsberg: And I'm suggesting that we have the natural power of compassion within us without having to go much further.
Lofton: But this doesn't solve the problem of *sin* and why people worship Moloch in the first place! Sin is a serious problem.
Ginsberg: When people learn to recognize their own vulnerability and compassionate nature, and their own suffering, they will extend that sympathy to others.
Lofton: But I want to deal with what you so articulately attacked in "Howl"—Moloch-worship. I want to shake your hand and agree that Moloch-worship is bad. But when you tell a man to get off his face, and stop worshiping his false god, you have to put something there in its place.
Ginsberg: Human sympathy. Basic human good nature and sympathy. That's what I was saying in the third part of "Howl."
Lofton: That's it? And since then, over thirty years ago, you have no more ideas about what man needs to do to stop committing idolatry.
Ginsberg: I've come a little farther. Because in those days I was more of a monotheist persuasion than I am now, which is more pantheistic. By 1965, having been to India, and experiencing other religions and meditation practices, I felt the monotheistic attitude was

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perhaps an extension of egotism, an attempt to preserve one's ego forever by putting it in heaven.

Lofton: But if ever there was a place where man created gods in his own image, it is in India. And also in the ancient world, Greece and Rome. Whereas the God of the Old Testament is a God no human being could make up. He is beyond the mind of man to invent. In other words, the God of the Old Testament, the God of the Hebrews, is the *opposite* of a god made in man's image.

Ginsberg: The Buddhist approach is interesting because it attempts to cultivate awareness by examining all your thoughts, and your mind—to practice long periods of sitting, meditation, observing your thoughts and feelings, and their texture, and actually observing the stuff of the mind. It's really interesting if you do it in a prolonged way.

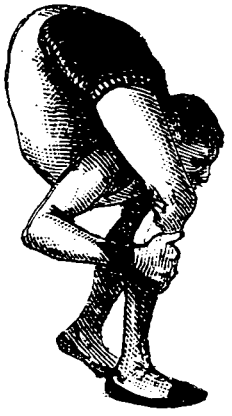
Lofton: But this is bad because it is an egocentric religion. Whereas the Christian religion says (in Luke 14:11) that whoever exalts himself shall be abased, but whoever humbleth himself shall be exalted. The Christian religion is the opposite of self-exaltation. The idea there is to bring every thought *captive* to the mind of Christ. The idea is to empty self of self and put on Christ, the full armor of God. Self-centeredness is death. It is carnal.

Ginsberg: But when you examine the texture of your mind, you find after a while that the notion of self dissolves. That there never was a self there.

Lofton: Absolutely. Because God made you that way. St. Augustine said that God made us for himself and our hearts do not rest until they rest in *Him*. You don't know anything about your mind until you first know God. . . .

Ginsberg: But I'm suggesting that if you sat and examined your conceptions, and their texture, you'd find that notions, conceptions of God also dissolve with the dissolution of the notion of a permanent identity of the self. It's more like in Heraclitus where everything is flux. Or more like in Heisenberg where when you look at a wave, it finally dissolves.

Lofton: And this is precisely the way the Bible says it will be for people like you who have no faith. St. Paul says in the book of Romans that all men know God, his eternal power and Godhead. But the problem of the unbeliever is that he knows God but suppresses this knowledge, the truth of God. The unbeliever holds down this truth in unrighteousness. And instead of worshiping the Creator, he worships the *creature*.



Ginsberg: But I'm not recommending worshiping anything.

Lofton: But what you believe ends up as self-worship.

Ginsberg: You just examine the self and you find that the self disappears. It isn't there.

Lofton: But the self makes sense only in terms of God Almighty. You start with God. Because if the starting point is you, you are dead in the water.

Ginsberg: It sounds like you are trying to preserve the self here.

Lofton: No. I'm saying the true road to inner peace and happiness lies in divesting the self of self.

Ginsberg: That could be. But I don't think you divest self of self by beating up on the self. That's more self. You just have to sit there and observe the self dissolve.

Lofton: But Christianity isn't a works religion. It isn't anything *you* do. It's the Holy Spirit of God!

Ginsberg: If you sit there and don't do anything you'll notice your self dissolving. . . .

Lofton: But when you study the religions of ancient Greece and Rome, and contrast them with Christianity, you realize that the modern idea of the self, the person, originated in the Old and New Testaments. The idea that there is such a thing as the individual, with inalienable rights that the state cannot deny, that there is intrinsic worth and value in persons, is a *Christian* idea. You don't see this idea in *India* where some poor sap who's rotting away is assumed to have his problems because he deserved them, because he has bad karma. This is a *terrible* religious belief. The ancient Hebrews and Christians (by God's grace) invented this idea of the person you are so attracted to. You seem to want to believe that humans are made in God's image. But this is irrational for you since you reject this faith.

Ginsberg: All this makes it sound like you're still trying to defend the notion of a permanent self.

Lofton: I believe the Bible, that we're all created in the image of God.

Ginsberg: Well, you're going to be stuck with yourself for a long time, if you want to be [*laughing*]. . . . It's much simpler than you're making it. You're having to drag in a supreme self to do the job for you.

Lofton: But God isn't like us. He isn't just a big one of us.

Ginsberg: How do you see God?

Lofton: I believe in the God of the Bible.

Ginsberg: And what is your notion of that?

Lofton: My notions come from Scripture. See?

Ginsberg: Everybody does who believes in the Christian God. . . . Do you believe in a permanent Hell?

Lofton: Absolutely. And I'll tell you, friend, you don't have to believe in Hell to go there. This is not a condition of entry.

Ginsberg: Well, you know there's an old saying that all the conditions of being are transitory. A wise old Buddhist once told me that if you see something horrible, don't cling to it. And if you see something beautiful, don't cling to it. I think your problem is clinging and attachment, grasping, a kind of greed for Heaven, an element of greed for selfhood in Heaven.

Lofton: Oh, yes. Christians throughout the centuries have loved Heaven so much that they have done a lot to try and get other people there.

Ginsberg: They've had inquisitions.

Lofton: That was the state, Mr. Ginsberg. Besides, I'm a Reformed Protestant and I don't have to defend the Inquisition.

Ginsberg: Ah.

Lofton: The difference between us is that you don't want to proselytize, really, for anything you believe in. In fact, if you were totally honest with me,

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you'd admit that you don't even want to impose what you believe in on yourself.
Ginsberg: I certainly would not like to impose any conception on myself.
Lofton: But I've read that you don't want to proselytize for homosexuality even though you're a homosexual. And I've read that you would like to have children. Would you want your kids to be homosexuals?
Ginsberg: If they would have as rich a life as I have had I wouldn't object.
Lofton: Rich? Rich by what standard?
Ginsberg: Appreciative of the phenomenal world, creative in the world of music and poetry and genuine speech, together with body and mind. . . .

[*At this point we disagree about how best to communicate with people.*]
Ginsberg: If you really want to change people, or enlighten them, or to communicate with them, you have to give them space to come out of themselves.
Lofton: No. Space. You've had too much space.
Ginsberg: You have to do it gently so it isn't just a contest of your will or ego against theirs. In a sense what you do is present your feisty, cock-a-doodle-do ego—
Lofton: No, no. Nice try. Another *ad hominem* attack. And this is another sad thing about unbelievers such as yourself. Since you're egocentric, you assume every other person is acting like yourself.
Ginsberg: I'm trying to be candid with you.
Lofton: Fine. And I'm saying that you are candidly *wrong*.
Ginsberg: Look, I'm just trying to tell you what I'm thinking about.
Lofton: But I haven't, in this conversation, implied, in any way, that you are saying anything you don't really believe. My problem is with what you really *believe*.
Ginsberg: Why aren't you thankful that I'm at least being candid?
Lofton: No. Candid, schmandid. I'm concerned about your soul. Do you believe you have a soul?
Ginsberg: I'm not sure there is a permanent soul to worry about. That's one of those arbitrary conceptions so characteristic of monotheism. The Buddhists say you don't have to worry about that. The question is the transparency of your thoughts, not getting attached to conceptions of the soul. But leaving the whole space open so what you think is soul can dissolve, and open up to the great space that exists. Appreciate the actual vastness of the place where we are now.
Lofton: What does this mean?
Ginsberg: Out the window is all of Washington, the sky—
Lofton: Mr. Ginsberg, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. I don't need to be told by an unbeliever about the great marvels of the world and the universe.
Ginsberg: I think we all need to be reminded of the vastness of the place we are in. And we forget that when we get into these little snits and arguments about—
Lofton: About *God*? I think more important is Who created all of this, not its vastness.
Ginsberg: You know people could even believe in God but not really appreciate how vast He or the universe is.
Lofton: I agree with that.
Ginsberg: People can get hung up on the words, on the possession of the ideas and take pride and vanity in their belief.
Lofton: Sure.
Ginsberg: So you have that little problem to deal with.
Lofton: You think pride and vanity are bad?
Ginsberg: It depends whether you are aware of it or not. If you are aware of your pride, it probably does less damage than if you are not. Then, at least, you see through it and use it in a way that is above conscious. . . .
Lofton: Drugs. You seem to have ingested every drug imaginable and—
Ginsberg: [*laughing*] I never did get around to crack or coke.
Lofton: Let me finish my question. And you probably ingested many drugs which are not imaginable but which, alas, do exist. What is your opinion regarding the use of drugs? And why haven't you taken crack? Can't you buy any, or is there a crack shortage?
Ginsberg: Well, the word "drug" comes from a word meaning dried herb. I've tried peyote, which is an American Indian sacrifice—
Lofton: I know the list. But what about now, the current debate about drugs? Should all drugs be legalized?
Ginsberg: The most interesting one I've tried recently is ecstasy, which is misnamed because empathy is its quality.
Lofton: But should all drugs be legalized? Or are you concerned that too many people are using and being damaged by drugs?
Ginsberg: First, we have the difficult problem of the drug I just got off of, nicotine. I just quit smoking a week ago. . . .
Lofton: Why did you quit?
Ginsberg: The pain of being addicted was greater than the pain of stopping. My gums were used to being inflamed.
Lofton: How much did you smoke?
Ginsberg: By this time it had gotten up to a pack a day.
Lofton: Then maybe the way I can make you believe in God is to make your gums hurt.
Ginsberg: It certainly stopped me from smoking. Anyway, that's the worst drug I've ever had personally in terms of addiction. Alcohol I've never had trouble with because I don't drink.
Lofton: Should all drugs be legalized?
Ginsberg: They're all different and should be treated differently. Marijuana could be decriminalized completely. . . . Heroin I would medicalize completely and take away from the hands of the police. Heroin addicts are sick like alcoholics and should be treated as such.
Lofton: But are these really addictions? Do you believe that some people are simply suicidal and have a death wish, and just choose to destroy themselves?
Ginsberg: I think some people do have that. Not all. But some. And some are just hyper-addictive types.
Lofton: Do you know what the 36th verse of the Proverb 8 says?
Ginsberg: Do you want to know my view on drugs?
Lofton: Yes, but I thought God's view might be more important so I interrupted you.
Ginsberg: Go right ahead. You're very selfless, I must say.
Lofton: Indeed. Why else would I come to talk with Allen Ginsberg on a Sunday? It certainly can't be self-interest, can it?
Ginsberg: No, I have to hand it to you for that. It's probably one of the more generous things you have done recently.
Lofton: Thank you. In Proverbs 8, the 36th verse, we are told that all who

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hate God love death. If you don't believe in God, you hate Him. You are a God-hater, Mr. Ginsberg.

Ginsberg: [*laughing*] You make a big jump there. It's like are you with me or against me?

Lofton: That's what God says, *exactly*! You know what the First Commandment says.

Ginsberg: Actually, I don't.

Lofton: Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. This was said to your people—you say you are a Jew. He led you out of bondage, out of the wilderness. And you shall have no other God. And when they worshiped other gods, you know what happened? Death.

Ginsberg: Well, yeah.

Lofton: Let me close with a political question. In your 1967 poem "Returning North of the Vortex," you said, regarding the Vietnam War: "I hope we lose this war / Let the Vietcong win over the American Army!" And you went on to say that if you had your wish, we would lose our will, we would be broken, and our armies would be scattered. Do you still believe this and think it was a good thing we lost the Vietnam War?

Ginsberg: I think I lost my temper there. I was getting into a sort of righteous wrath like you're always doing, saying that we're sinners and should be punished for our sins. This was sort of like a poem, a double statement—

Lofton: But you were for the Vietcong. You were pro-Vietcong.

Ginsberg: Not actually.

Lofton: *What?*

Ginsberg: Not actually.

Lofton: But you said "Let the Vietcong win over the American Army!"

Ginsberg: I was making a poetic curse and it was probably bad judgment.

Lofton: Then you think it was bad we lost the war?

Ginsberg: No, I don't think it was that bad that we lost the war. I don't think it would have been any better had we won it.

Lofton: Really? But it certainly was bad that we lost for millions of Southeast Asians, wasn't it?

Ginsberg: Yeah, but it probably would still be bad for them—they would still be fighting over there if we had won it, probably.

Lofton: But there were more people killed there after we left, after you guys got your way, after your "peace" was given a chance! We got out but there was no peace. Millions of Cambodians were slaughtered. They're still fighting. What happened? You were wrong.

Ginsberg: We destabilized the government of Cambodia and precipitated that whole scene.

Lofton: So *we* were the bad guys and not the Khmer Rouge, who actually conducted the genocide?

Ginsberg: But we opened the way for them.

Lofton: How?

Ginsberg: By destabilizing the government.

Lofton: But why would this make the Khmer Rouge Communists commit genocide against their own people? Why do you blame *us*?

Ginsberg: I'm just pointing out that we had a situation where the lid was being kept on the Khmer Rouge and the CIA had a long period of time to destabilize this. The bombing made this situation worse.

Lofton: So the Communists weren't genocidal until we bombed them?

Ginsberg: That finally our people working with our intelligence agencies got rid of Sihanouk and installed really unpopular puppets. And that created an opening for the Khmer Rouge—

Lofton: So the Cambodians got what they deserved? Is that your point? What is your point? If everything is as you state it, so what?

Ginsberg: My point is that the US government and intelligence agencies destabilized the situation in Cambodia and created such chaos that the Khmer Rouge got in and committed genocide.

Lofton: Then you *are* blaming us for the Khmer Rouge genocide. Do you denounce what the Khmer Rouge did?

Ginsberg: Sure.

Lofton: Then why don't you say a couple of words about what you think of the Cambodian genocide committed by the Communist Khmer Rouge? Why don't we close on this with, perhaps, a little poem?

Ginsberg: Yes. Blood running inside the head of John Foster Dulles flowed through the bodies of Cambodians onto the streets of Phnom Phen.

Lofton: *This was supposed to be a poem denouncing the Khmer Rouge, not John Foster Dulles!*

Ginsberg: Well, you remember—

Lofton: You blew it.

Ginsberg: The whole problem was that Foster Dulles didn't want to recognize the Geneva Convention and refused to sign up for an election in Vietnam because Eisenhower thought that—

Lofton: But you're still excusing the Communists. After *all* these years you can't bring yourself to denounce the Communists. Why not?

Ginsberg: No. I've denounced the Communists—

Lofton: Baloney! I asked you to end with a little poem denouncing the Khmer Rouge and you attack John Foster Dulles!

Ginsberg: You asked me to denounce the Communists on your terms. But I'd rather denounce them on my terms.

Lofton: Yeah. By denouncing John Foster Dulles.

Ginsberg: I'd rather denounce them on *my* terms. But I'd rather not just denounce them, but try to point out that everybody is complicit in this situation.

Lofton: Speak for yourself. I didn't have anything to do with Cambodian genocide. Did you? Do you take some blame for that?

Ginsberg: I would be willing to take some blame. And I think we should all take blame.

Lofton: What role did you play in causing this genocide? And have you apologized to any Cambodians?

Ginsberg: Yes.

Lofton: Who? Who did you apologize to?

Ginsberg: Uh, uh, you're setting up something here which is not, it's like, again, you're going back to this black and white, either/or interrogation.

Lofton: But some things are black and white.

Ginsberg: And this comes from your monotheistic insistence.

Lofton: Is *nothing* black and white?

Ginsberg: Nothing is completely black and white. Nothing.

Lofton: I see. Thank you very much.

John Lofton is a journalist in Washington, DC. Allen Ginsberg is the author of "Howl" and, most recently, Collected Poems: 1947-1980. *This interview was conducted on February 28, 1988, in Washington.*

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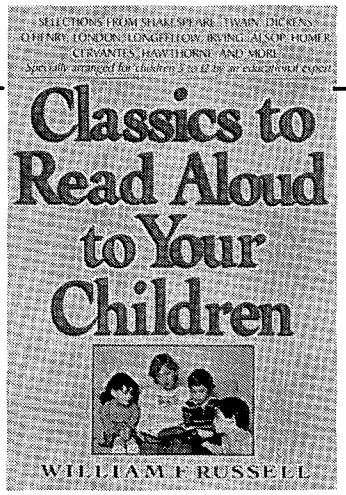
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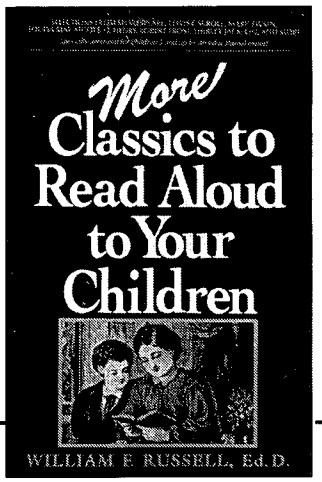

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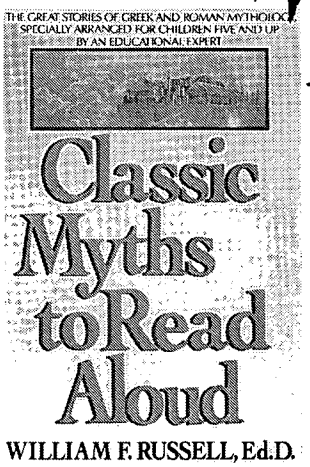
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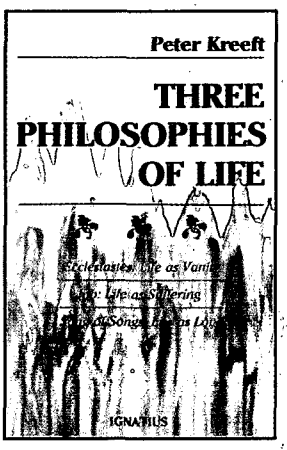

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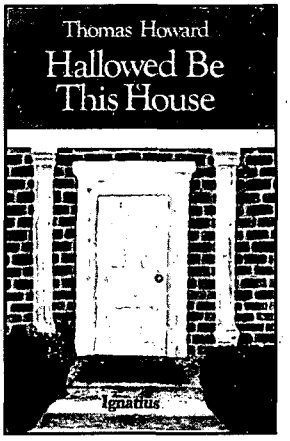

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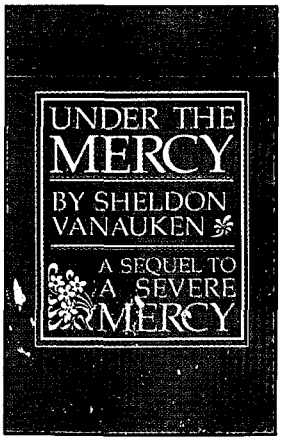

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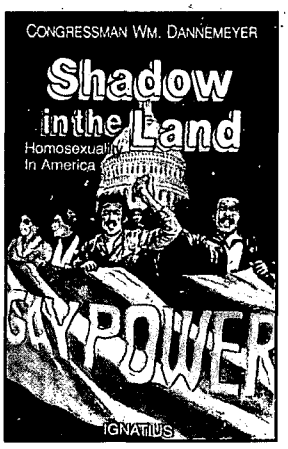

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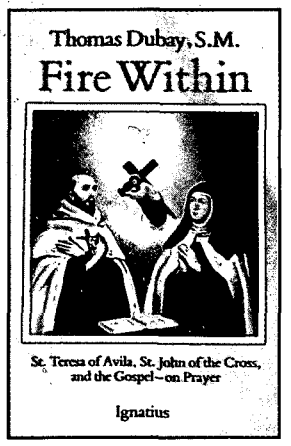

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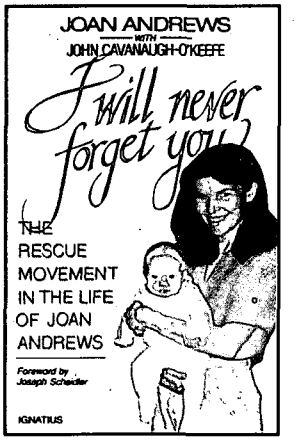

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